THE THREE CURATES

AUTHOR OF

"BROKEN SUNSHINE"

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A Novel.

BY

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Author of "BROKEN SUNSHINE."

"Nothing is new; we walk where others went;
There's no vice now but has its precedent."

—HERRICK.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE THREE CURATES

CHAPTER I.

SPRING had come and gone, summer was departing, and yet Colonel and Mrs. Luttrell lingered among the Italian lakes. They were so happy, and it was so beautiful. Of course Colonel Luttrell had resigned. They thought next autumn they would go over to India and take Sabina back to her parents. They had very good accounts of her, and they knew she would be truly cared for with Lady Laura, who had volunteered the charge of her, and there was a great friendship between Mrs. Vere and Miss Maitland. Edward Lewis and his wife Grace were perfectly happy, and Mrs.

Luttrell was well posted up in all the amusing details of country life by Percy Blythe, so there was no need to hurry home, and Colonel and Mrs. Luttrell were free to follow their own wills, which took them to one place after another. They had thought of sending for Sabina to share their delight, but that young lady had emphatically declared her preference for London and Lady Laura; and on the whole Mrs. Luttrell was secretly pleased at this decision, for Sabina was a capricious young person. Selwyn thought his life beautiful with the woman he loved—for ever his own—and asked for nothing more. He had gradually recovered his health, but a certain lameness had remained. They thought of trying some of the waters, but he really did not repine at this, for it always awoke his wife's tenderness and sympathy. And if he tried any cure it was

more to please her than himself. What did it all signify? He could not be happier. After his long journey in the wilderness of life, he seemed to have reached such a peaceful and happy haven, that he was more than content, for his crown was in his heart, not on his head.

And Mrs. Luttrell never regretted it. For every woman with a tender heart appreciates a man's devotion, when he offers her his noblest gift—his entire love. And this man had never loved but one woman—herself. And at these soft Italian lakes, with their beautiful blue skies, they both felt their life was crowned with happiness.

"I suppose, Selwyn, we shall have to go back? We can't go on here for ever."

"No," said he, with a slight sigh. "But we can always come back again. It has been so beautiful!"

"So we can. But I think we must be going homeward. I hear from Lady Laura that Sabina is making conquests in all directions."

"I fear she is somewhat of a flirt."

Mrs. Luttrell only smiled. She knew she was.

"Could you not just suggest that it is wrong, Edith?"

"No! no, Selwyn. You really must do that yourself. You are her uncle, and the one she loves best. Besides, it would have so much more effect."

"Well, dear, I must take her in hand when we get home."

Mrs. Luttrell laughed. No one was more indulgent to Sabina than her great tall uncle. But if there was any lecturing to be done, let him do it by all means.

The next day came a letter from Lady Laura, telling the news of a proposal of

marriage to Sabina from Lord Frampton; but the young man would write himself to Colonel Luttrell."

"Well, Miss Sabina has not lost much time," said Mrs. Luttrell.

"I shall wait for Sabina's letter before I do anything in the matter," said the Colonel. "But I think she might do worse. I believe he is a kind-hearted young fellow. Only—"

"Only what, dear?" said his wife, seeing he paused.

"That I wish Sabina was steadier. She requires a firm hand, and I almost fear young Frampton will give way to her too much. There is a great deal in managing a wife let me tell you, Mrs. Luttrell."

"Your long experience of matrimony tells you that, Selwyn?"

"Don't laugh at me, Edith. You are not a woman who requires managing; but

I have seen the want of it, and it makes all the difference in people's married life. What treatment would suit one woman does not apply to all; and I say that Sabina requires a kind, firm husband, and that will be the only fear I shall have with regard to Frampton."

Sabina's letter came, full of sunny expressions, just like herself. She was a little elated with her conquest, and intended to take Lord Frampton in hand, though in what way she did not say. "Make haste and come home, there's a dear old uncle. Though nothing can be kinder than Lady Laura or dear Pauline Vere, she and her husband are so nice, and Adolphus Frampton is no end of fun, though he and Arthur don't get on too well; and, considering they are cousins, it is very wrong of them."

"I expect Miss Maitland is the cause of

their disagreement," said Mrs. Luttrell with a smile, as she leant over her husband's shoulder and read the letter.

"I do think life in London is charming. And at the Veres' one meets so many nice people, though I expect you and Aunt Edith are enjoying the lakes quite as much. Perhaps I shall make a tour some of these days, in the company of a certain person."

And with a few more comments the letter ended.

"I shall not write to George or Ellen until I have had a talk with the young man. And all I have to say is this, that I hope young Frampton will be as truly happy as I am."

"That is a nice little compliment, Selwyn."

"No dear, not a compliment, but the most delightful truth."

But there was just this with these two.

Theirs was the mature love of middle age, when the feelings are strong, the love deep, and the judgment clear and calm. Sabina and her lover would have to steer through many a shoal, many a quicksand, before their bark reached smooth waters. Mrs. Luttrell felt all this, but said nothing to her husband.

She was thankful herself when she saw the hue of health return to his face, but his lameness grieved her. However, they would have to return now on account of Sabina's affair.

It was with some regret they bid adieu to the lovely Italian waters, and turned their faces homewards.

CHAPTER II.

NEARLY two years had passed, and once more Sir Ernest and Lady Beldon were sitting over their breakfast table at Heminglee in the sunny morning room overlooking the south garden. Esmé a trifle more matronly, but otherwise as young as ever, her coquettish little mob-cap framing her face like an old picture. Each were busy with their letters; Lady Beldon, having finished hers, rang the bell.

"I must have my son down, Ernest. Do make haste and get all that tiresome correspondence over, so that you can give all due attention to your heir. I am perfectly sure he is the most beautiful baby in all England."

"All mothers think that," said her hus-

band, as he lighted a cigar, to help him with his letters, which were business ones, and not of acute interest. "But I will say this much, there isn't a prettier woman than his mother."

"Ernest!" Nevertheless, the idea was appreciated, for Lady Beldon walked round to where he sat; and, standing behind him, drew his head back and gave a very affectionate kiss to his sun-burnt forehead. "You are just an old flatterer, and a dear one to boot."

These little affectionate amenities of married life, how they smoothe its wheels! I wonder if men ever do think what these timely little flatteries mean! Just clear sparkling wells—in sometimes a dreary wilderness—of calm, blind, indifference, begotten of daily familiarity. A woman requires all these little elixirs, to keep her young in heart, if not in

years—and often they are left to other women's husbands, and then sometimes there is poison in the draught.

Ernest Beldon was intensely in love with his sweet young wife—she looked as dainty and as fresh as the day she married—and he felt his happiness complete with wife and child.

The Baby—otherwise Lanyon Esmé Beldon—made his appearance at this juncture; he certainly justified his mother's highly qualified panegyric. For he was a most beautiful child. His eyes were as blue as a hare-bell, his skin like rose-leaf satin, while his lovely golden curls clustered all over his head. His young mother folded him in her arms, with infinite tenderness. "Oh, Sonny! Sonny! I do hope you will grow up as good and loving as your father.

"I must say, Esmé, I do think it's a pity

that all that beauty is so thoroughly wasted! it would have made the fortune of any girl! Whereas, as it is—it is a mistake. Beauty in a man is of so little consequence, indeed I am not sure it is not a drawback, it makes them so conceited! because the women make such fools of them."

"Oh, Ernest! it hasn't made you conceited!"

"Surely, my little wife, you don't think *me* handsome?" And he laughed his jolly, happy laugh at the idea.

"Why! I think you perfect, Ernest! Handsome! of course I consider you *very* handsome!"

"You are the first woman who has ever thought so!"

Just then Cyril Dashwood came to Esmé's memory; she vividly remembered the handsome perfect features of her first love. "It was all outside," she thought.

Then Lady Beldon, and her son, walked out, or rather it would be more correct to say, she guided his tiny footsteps into the garden, where the small man was attracted by the tall stately lilies, who looked down upon his little flower face. But to wish, was to have, with Baby, so his mother pulled down to his level, a beautiful white lily, and the child buried his face in its large cup, and emerged with it covered with yellow dust.

"Oh, Baby, Baby!" and she knelt down and dusted it off—while he broke the flower from its stem. "Oh, Baby! what have you done! poor flower! Let us take it to dear father!" And they entered, fragrant with the perfume of the beautiful broken lily, which the small man vigorously stuck to."

"Why, Ernest! there is yet another letter unopened!"

"By Jove! so there is. I never saw it." He broke open the envelope, and a bewildered look came over his face—"I say, Esmé, just listen—

"Sydney, New South Wales,

"June 4th, 1882.

"Sir Ernest Beldon,

"DEAR SIR,—

"By the instructions of our client, Mr. Joseph Stratton, we are writing to request your presence in this country, at your earliest convenience. Your uncle, Mr. Stratton, is gradually sinking. He wishes us to state that all his large property, here, is left absolutely to you, and he would be thankful to see one of his own kin before he dies.

"We are, dear Sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"GREY AND FISHER.

"To Sir Ernest Beldon, Bart."

"It must be my uncle Joe, my mother's elder brother; we have not heard anything of him for years and years. How strange! I thought he was dead!"

"Ernest! you won't have to go, will you?" said his wife, with a sinking of heart.

"I fear so, dear. It is so difficult to refuse a dying man, and it will be all the better for this small man of yours."

"Ah! we are so happy as we are. No more money can bring us greater happiness."

"I fear, dear wife, there is no option."

"If you are compelled to go, and—this—this money comes to us, you will divide it between Hortense as well? They could so well do with a little more."

"Good little woman that you are! Certainly my kind sister shall have her share, but it is so like you to think of it."

There was a deep silence between the

two. Baby sat on the white rug with the wrecks of the lily in his rosy little hands.

"Ernest, *could* you not take me too?" and the pleading face was raised to his.

"Darling! it could hardly be. You know there are several reasons! Why, dear!" said he, speaking cheerfully, "No one thinks anything of these journeys now —either to India, Australia, or America! If I can catch the next steamer, I shall be there the inside of seven weeks! Say a fortnight or even a month in Sydney! Why in eighteen weeks I should be back again!"

"It will be a terrible time," said Lady Beldon, who had never been separated a day from her husband since their marriage.

"Esmé!" and his voice was full of tenderness as he drew her towards him. "Suppose, instead of a humdrum country squire, I had been a soldier? There are

times and places, when and where a man *must* leave all those dearest to him, behind. And who can say if they ever meet again? Whereas, I am not going out to fight for my country! And think, love, out of our great store of love and comfort, ought we not to spare one crumb to a desolate dying old man?"

"Ah! how selfish I am!"

"*That* you are not!" said her husband, kissing fondly the tender face with its humid eyes. "I leave you in charge of "my wife and son." So my princess must be strong, and buckle to!"

"When must you start, Ernest?"

"Let us look at the newspaper. Ah! the 'Rhone' sails on Thursday from the London Docks. I will go up to-day and get a berth in her." He took up his son from the hearthrug, and kissing him again and again, gave him to his mother. "Now,

Esmé, ring for nurse to take him. And if you like, and could get ready quickly, you might go up to town with me!"

"That I will, Ernest!"

"I would suggest, Esmé, during my absence, you and the child go down to the sea—say Ilfracombe. Then you will be near Hester, and I feel she will wish you to be under her wing."

"I will do whatever you wish! Only *try* and get back as quickly as you can."

"Rest assured of that, dear wife!"

A berth was procured, and Esmé went all over the great steamer, deeply interested in her husband's "water hotel," so comfortable and so luxurious. It was to sail, all being well, at one o'clock on Thursday. There was much to be done. Sir Ernest had to see his solicitors; he left nothing undone that could add to his wife's comfort during their enforced separation.

To Hester he wrote a long letter, telling her everything, and every detail of business. To her care he confided his wife. Esmé had determined to see him off, and he begged Mrs. Lanyoa to come up to town (if she could leave her own young child), and remain with her for a day or two —all of which it is needless to say she did.

The Thursday morning had arrived. Sir Ernest, his wife, and Hester were on board. Esmé had seen all her husband's impedimenta placed in his berth, had arranged a bouquet of flowers, her own photograph, and the child's, on a little stand. The warning bell was rung! The last passionate embrace, the strong hand-clasp with Mrs. Lanyon, "Take care of her, Hester," the last of the cargo hauled up, the gangway removed, and the stately vessel slowly steamed off. Esmé could see her husband through her blinding tears,

and to the last she watched, till the vessel or ship was lost in a haze of smoke and distance.

"Come, darling," said Hester gently, "the train is just ready to start," and, still holding the young wife's hand in hers, she watched over her with the old protecting love. And when, faint and weary and heart-sore, poor Esmé reached Heminglee, Hester saw her safely to bed, and busied herself with the preparation for their departure to Luscombe Manor on the following Saturday, for it had been the wish of Sir Ernest that his wife and child should remain, if possible, with or near Hester, and Mrs. Lanyon was unfeignedly glad to have Esmé again with her. But she had her own responsibilities at Luscombe, so that her stay at Heminglee must perforce be of short duration.

There had been great rejoicings at the

birth of Hester's child, which was now only three months old. But the old Baronet was more than gratified; it seemed the crowning point of his life. In this satisfaction old Percival shared—so there were absolutely three generations at Luscombe!

It had been a day of rejoicing all over the vast estate, and the cause of many good things to the tenants, but still there was to be the grand christening, which, owing to circumstances, had been postponed. And that was looming in the future.

Hester wrote to have every arrangement made for Esmé's comfort, so the two ladies, Esmé's two female servants, and the young heir reached the station, where they were met by Gerald.

Esmé was warmly welcomed by them all, and Hester was doubly happy, for nothing would ever reduce her love for her adopted child.

CHAPTER III.

After that memorable day, when Cyril Dashwood had tramped to and fro Moor Hall, there seemed a change in him. Whether or not the villagers thought they had judged him harshly, or whether they forgave him his (in their eyes) faults, it would be difficult to say; but there certainly *was* an approach to something like kinder feelings. They would talk to him of Miss Peggy (and he fancied he liked the subject), of Miss Kitty, and Miss Polly; of the many lads of the dear old parson; and he saw how the family had lived in the hearts of these rough-hewn natures.

Mr. Dashwood duly sent over the umbrella and another supply of roses. And he called a day or two afterwards to see

the master and mistress of Moor Hall, a rather severe military man, a delicate fragile wife, and two fair-haired children. Miss Orme looked much better; pretty, decidedly, he thought; her hair, which was dark and crisp, was now neatly fastened up behind, but it wandered about in all sorts of little brown tendrils; her face, no longer disfigured by tears, was soft and fresh; and her eyes, clear and deep, had a somewhat sad wistful look. He thought Moor Hall seemed a dull, depressing place, and not likely to cheer a young heart already overweighted with care.

They drove over, with the exception of Mrs. Fraser, on the following Sunday to the service.

"I think you have improved it," said Miss Orme, referring to the alterations "I know father considered the chancel ought

to be restored, and new furniture; but there was no money; and the villagers did not mind in the very least."

"No, I believe that is one of the causes of their offence. They actually preferred it as it was, and looked upon what I did as a ruthless innovation."

"They are slow to take in new ideas—but I see the carriage is ready, so I must say good-bye."

"When will you come over again, Miss Peggy?"

"I cannot say; I long to, though; perhaps, Mrs. Fraser and I will drive over one afternoon. She is very kind and gentle. You will like her when you know her."

"Come and see *your* garden when you can. All visitors are like angels here—some, of course, more than others."

She smiled kindly at him, and his implied compliment.

"I think the people have been kinder to me since your visit."

"I am glad," she answered, warmly. "Now good-bye, once more." And, grasping his hand with firm, warm touch, she swiftly walked down to the carriage. The little girls were already in, and the General was awaiting her.

"Mr. Dashwood has been telling me about the restoration. I think it was greatly needed, but it was not dear father's fault," she said, with tender loyalty to her dead parent.

"I am sure of it," said Mr. Dashwood.

Peggy gave him a swift little glance.

"We are so little at Moor Hall, Mr. Dashwood, but if you are disposed to come over and dine with us, *sans ceremonie*, Mrs. Fraser and myself will be glad to see you."

The invitation was not given with cordi-

ality, but with courteous, cold politeness; but Peggy's eyes said "Come!" So he said: "Thank you, I will come over one evening."

"Don't forget to drive over when you can," he whispered, while General Fraser was speaking to the coachman.

"Indeed, no!"

And then they set off at a smart pace, and he watched the carriage across the moor.

Cyril turned slowly back into the Vicarage. How Peggy Orme had brightened it!

Just now the garden was at its brightest, and while his dinner was preparing, he walked to the summer-house and sat down. It was henceforth hallowed by her presence. It was no longer to him a place of creeping things innumerable, but filled with love and affection.

Within a week Mrs. Fraser and Miss Orme

were announced. He had just finished his sermon for the following Sunday, and was putting away the MS. He begged the ladies to come into his study, as it was the only habitable sitting-room.

"You see a lonely bachelor does not require a suite of sitting-rooms."

"Have you no sister who can come and live with you?" asked Mrs. Fraser kindly.

"No. My only sister is married. I deal largely in brothers; I am the eldest of four."

"Dear Mrs. Fraser, while you and Mr. Dashwood are talking, I am going into the garden. I know I may." She disappeared through the long French window.

"Dear girl!" said Mrs. Fraser, looking after her. "It was a terrible wrench when they had to leave their home. They were so happy here. And I expect the people miss her. She did so much for her father among them."

"I am convinced they do. I am sure, I wish they could have all lived here; but I fear it is a pain many of the wives and children of the clergy have to bear—an uprooting of home ties for which there seems no help. Mrs. Fraser, will you have some tea? or some wine?"

"Thank you, I should like some tea. Here comes Peggy. With flowers, as usual."

"You see, Mr. Dashwood, I have taken you at your word, for I have helped myself to these lovely carnations. Just smell them, Mrs. Fraser!"

"They are delicious!"

"Miss Orme, will you kindly give us our tea?" And Peggy did the honours in her old home.

A very pleasant time was spent, and it was with a regretful sigh he saw them drive off. However, he still had the dinner in prospect.

Two years had nearly flown over their heads. Again Miss Orme had been abroad, but the family were expected back at Moor Hall very shortly. From time to time Cyril had received little short epistles from Peggy, generally upon little parish matters, or little charities in which Mrs. Fraser was interested. Cyril Dashwood had had one or two brief holidays. He had become accustomed to the somewhat monotonous life; but the little notes from Peggy kept a feeling warm in his breast, which was unconsciously taking root. And almost as unconsciously was his character gradually improving. Perhaps it was *she* thought so highly of him? Once Miss Orme had suggested his writing for some magazines. "I think it would be such a good thing, especially during the winter's evening. They *must* be so long, and so lonely." He followed her advice. And, as

he certainly was not wanting in mental parts, his articles were very well received. It not only gave him pleasant employment, but remuneration as well. And so the time wore on.

Most unexpectedly his father had died, leaving a moderate fortune, of which his eldest son had the largest share, as the father still hoped great things would yet come, though, so far, Fortune had looked coldly on his ambition.

But this increase of income put all thoughts of anxiety away. He was saving money. Peggy Orme still ruled over the garden from afar; her directions and suggestions were implicitly carried out. This gave him a secret pleasure. "I wonder what she will think of this?" Or, "Will that be looking well when she returns?"

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. and Mrs. Lanyon, with their guests, were in the tapestry drawing-room. A quaint, large old room, with furniture of Dutch marqueterie, with its curious inlaying, giving so much colour and warmth. The old chairs and sofas, with their ancient, but still beautiful, brocade of gay flowers and cupids, were uncovered. It was a room very seldom used, so that it had not the cosy refinement of Hester's own sitting-room; but its arrangements were really artistic, and certainly valuable.

Sir Horace, in an old carved chair, sat near the fire, with a little table near him, and a shaded lamp. He was watching with quiet pleasure his nephew and his wife as they moved among their guests: There

was his great favourite, charming Lady Beldon! looking very lovely in her soft azure silk, but with just a tinge of sadness in her eyes and mouth, for she was longing for her husband's return. There was Cyril Dashwood, who had been invited by his old *confrère* Lanyon—all unsuspecting of the strange part he had played in the lives of Mrs. Lanyon and Lady Beldon—only too pleased to show hospitality to his old friends. There was Hester herself, moving gracefully about, in her black velvet and old Venetian point. And above all there was their cherished friend, Lady Louisa! They had all assembled for the christening of the heir of Lanyon, now six months old. For the young gentleman had been obliged to postpone his formal religious entry into the world, until his god-mother, Lady Louisa, could leave the Rector of Langton, who had been laid by, with a severe attack

of congestion of the lungs, and carefully and affectionately nursed by his wife and Percy Blythe.

And now the christening was over. The service had been performed by Cyril Dashwood at Gerald's request. The guests filed out into the dining room, and there were many county friends of the Lanyons, so that the great dining-room was none too large. The old Manor was lighted from turret to basement! The poor were to be regaled, and the tenants entertained.

Sir Horace felt that now he could depart in peace. The birth of his grand-nephew had given him extraordinary happiness, and this was shared by old Percival, who always included himself in all family arrangements.

Gerald Lanyon had quite taken his part as a country squire, and had a happy, pros-

perous look. He had grown stouter too, and was as happy as any man could be. It was the first time Cyril Dashwood had met Esmé since her marriage, now more than two years ago. He found her, if anything, more beautiful. There was a gentle dignity of wife and mother; and for the time the old love rushed back and filled his heart, and Peggy was forgotten. He had to take a pretty young girl in to dinner, but Lady Beldon was on his right. The round, white arm, with jewelled bracelet, the soft dimpled hand he had so often passionately kissed, the slender throat, the warm brown hair, he knew so well! And to think, but for his own wicked folly, it might have all been his! And there was ever humiliation with the thought! He could hear her talking to her neighbour; hear her expressing her impatient longing for her husband's return, which had been

delayed; that her little son, now fifteen months old, was with her!

His own partner thought him a most uninteresting man, for she got nothing but monosyllables for answers; so, excessively piqued, she devoted herself entirely to a bluff old gentleman on her other side, who was only too pleased to have the conversation of a bright-looking young girl, which left Cyril at liberty to listen to Esmé's conversation; he heard with something like jealousy the loving inflection of her voice as she spoke of her absent husband.

As the evening wore on, Mr. Dashwood found Lady Beldon a very different person from Esmé Curtis. There was a quiet dignity, a self-possession, as if she always remembered her husband's injunction. She was courteous and gracious to Cyril, but so she was to every man who approached her; he could trace no favour to himself—she never

referred to past days, as far as he was concerned. She was much sought after, and he thought with envy, in her young matronhood she was the loveliest woman he had ever seen.

As for his hostess, she was essentially a lady, and the friend invited by her husband was treated with every consideration, but he knew full well that she despised him. He was much surprised to find how marriage had improved her; she had always been dignified and graceful, but now there was a softness about her; and the unbounded love which encircled her, between Sir Horace and her husband, had drawn forth a latent sweetness of character which *he* certainly had never before observed.

He critically examined her, he found her almost handsome. There was a brilliancy in the deep grey eyes, a warmth on the

clear skin, a pervading look of happiness. Her love of Lady Louisa, her gentle tenderness to young Lady Beldon, filled him with infinite sadness—he was so thoroughly *outside* their barrier, and by his own want of manhood! Had it not been that he had a vague desire to see Esme once more—his love of olden days—he would hardly have accepted the warm invite of his friend Mr. Lanyon, and now *she* was further off than ever!

Her hand had not lost its cunning, neither her fingers their skill, for Chopin's delicate nocturne floated through the room, and then a charming little selection of Raff. And Hester's grand voice was also heard to advantage.

When the last guest had departed Gerald and Cyril retired into the former's smoking den, and had a pleasant chat over old times.

"I congratulate you, Lanyon, on your wife, your child, your home!"

"Yes, I think fortune has showered her choicest gifts upon me."

"When is Sir Ernest Beldon expected home?"

"In about a month, I believe; he has started. It is a great grief to his wife, his leaving at all."

"What did he go out for?"

"Oh, for a fortune," replied Mr. Lanyon with a laugh. "An uncle left him a large sheep run and valuable property in Sydney."

"What luck some people have!" said Dashwood, enviously.

"Well, they do old fellow! Perhaps your turn will come some day!"

"When I am too old to care for it."

"Nay, don't say that! Have another pipe? No! Well, then I had better show

you your bearings. These old houses are always rather puzzling, so, *allons !*"

They proceeded up the great staircase

"These rooms, opening out round this gallery, are mine and my wife's. Those over the other side are Lady Beldon's, her child and nurse ; here is yours, not far off as you see, from us all. Down that long corridor are my dear old uncle's apartments, and the servants' are down the opposite side. So now you know all about it! Good-night, old fellow, and I am glad to see you here."

"Thanks, Lanyon! many thanks! And in his soul he felt small, compared with the honest upright heart of his host.

He turned into his chamber, but he did not feel inclined to sleep, so he took off his coat, and put on a comfortable dressing-gown, and gave himself over to his reflections. Not quite pleasant ones. He

almost wished he had not come. An hour or two passed away, his candles were burning very low down in their sockets. He could hear a chiming of distant bells—one, two, three.

"How late it is!" and he got up and stretched himself.

Surely! did his eyes or his nose deceive him? Certainly, there was a quantity of smoke in the room. It came from under the door.

Great heavens! He tore open the door. The great staircase and hall below were full of smoke, and here and there little darts of fire. Esmé was his first thought. He flew to his washstand, dragged off the towels, dipped them hastily in the cold water prepared for his morning bath, wrung them and wound one round the lower part of his face, and rushed to awake Lanyon.

Then he flew to Lady Beldon's room, and with scant ceremony, pushed open the door.

"For Heavens sake! rise at once, Lady Beldon! I fear the place is on fire!"

"Save my child! save my boy! Never mind me!"

"I will try and save you both—only lose no time. Where is the child?"

"Through there; that door!" and she pointed in agony.

"Courage! Throw on a dressing-gown, cloak, anything!" and while he was thus directing her, he tore into the inner room, where the little creature lay sleeping like a cherub—roughly awaking the nurse—and with the child in his arms, he rushed back to Esmé, who stood ready, with a large cloak thrown over her.

"Come, there is not a moment to lose, tie this wet towel over your mouth."

"Let me take my child!"

"No, I will carry him! Place your arms round my neck and keep yourself covered up—now!" and with Esmé and the child in his arms he got through the door They were met by volumes of smoke, which almost blinded him; bright flames were darting in and out the carved balustrade. Down he staggered with his heavy burden. his chest heaving as if it would burst. Oh, if he could hold on for another second, till he reached the great door! He could hear the household—now near, now far off—shrieking, calling, moving everywhere. Esmé seemed to be fainting, for her weight became excessive, and the child on his other arm was beginning to wake up. They had reached the old door, and here was the tug of war, for the flames seemed leaping all round them.

With one despairing effort the door at

last was opened, and he almost fell with his burden on the terrace.

But he felt they were saved, and for a moment he became unconscious himself.

"Thank God, Esmé, you are safe!"

"Ah, Cyril! I owe my life and my child's to you. God bless you, my dear friend."

Oh, the sweetness of those words to him!

"Try and keep yourself and the child warm, while I go and see if I can help. Let me have that damp towel again. Put this over you," and he took off his heavy dressing-gown.

"Cyril! Cyril! I cannot let you do it. It will kill you. Pray keep it on, I *beg* you."

"I will obey your wish."

"Here come Lanyon, Mrs. Lanyon, and Lady Louisa."

"Thank God! you are safe, Esmé," said Hester. "And the child?"

"And yours, Hester?"

"It is here!" And she opened the large cloak and showed her sleeping babe closely pressed to her bosom.

The flames were pouring through the windows, but fortunately the wind blew from one quarter. So they hoped one part of the old Manor might be spared, and that was the portion occupied by the old Baronet.

Gerald had rushed back again to the burning pile, closely followed by Cyril Dashwood. But it was found impossible to get upstairs through the burning staircase. There was outside Sir Horace's window a stout old limb of ivy, and by the aid of this Gerald clambered up and Cyril after him. To smash in the window and undo the the old fastening was the work of a moment.

There was a little lamp still burning, but a strange silence reigned inside. Gerald rushed to the bed. There lay the old Baronet, and kneeling, with his head buried in the bed clothes closely clasping his master's hand, was Percival. There was a good deal of smoke in the room, but no trace of fire.

"Uncle Horace! Uncle! Wake up! I will get you safely out."

But no answer came.

Then Gerald looked closely at the quiet figure.

"Good God! Dashwood, he is dead!"

Yes, the old man was sleeping his last sleep.

And Percival?

Mr. Lanyon gently touched him on the shoulder. He moaned slightly, but seemed hardly conscious.

"Percival, dear old friend! you must

come with me; you can do no more for your dear old master."

Then the old servant seemed dimly to understand, for he turned his face—so wan, so haggard, that it cut Gerald to the heart.

"Oh, my master! my master! Would to God I had died for thee! The shock killed him, Master Gerald."

Then the poor old man fell to weeping so bitterly over the cold, lifeless hand of his dead master, that both the young men had tears in their eyes.

"Come, dear old Percival, I must take care of you now."

"No, sir; with your permission, I will remain here. There is nothing in life to live for."

"Percival!"

"Forgive me, I am near distraught."

"Lanyon! there are the fire engines below. This part of the building is really

safe. We had better see how the ladies are, and that all the women are safe."

So they drew a chair for poor old Percival, lifted him into it, covered him over with a blanket, and then descended by the same way as they had come up.

They found the lawn covered with every description of furniture, pictures, half-clad women, the men servants in most cases working valiantly to get out the most valuable articles, the local fire brigade in full swing, and busy and willing hands everywhere.

"Where is Sir Horace?" was asked by everyone, and it was with heartfelt grief Gerald had to tell them the sad news that the fright of the fire had caused his death, his faithful friend and servant being with him.

Deep sorrow was felt by all, but there was no time for lament.

However, the fire was being subdued; and an entrance having been effected to the still intact portion of the building, the men soon got a room ready for the ladies and young children, while Justine and Esmé's maid did their best to make their mistresses as comfortable as possible.

Cyril was indefatigable—indeed, Gerald feared he would seriously injure himself. He rescued valuable after valuable—he was in the thick of everything. The fire having been checked, and fortunately the wind having blown it from the building instead of to it, the flames had been confined to one end, which had been the kitchen and servants' portion. They found out afterwards it was caused by the oversetting of a lamp by a man-servant, who had indulged greatly in the convivialities of the interesting occasion.

After a time the butler groped his way

to the wine cellar and brought out some wine and brandy, which were distributed among the cold and shivering company.

By daybreak the fire was completely extinguished. And as the sun rose what a hideous great black scar was over one portion of the beautiful old mansion.

As Gerald stood and gazed on it the tears came to his eyes. His uncle dead, and the grand old home partially burned!

He went up to old Percival, and found him dozing, worn out with his long weary watch; then, as he stood silent and sad, the tired servant opened his eyes.

"I beg your pardon, sir, I am sure! I think I was tired."

"Percival, you must drink this; I have brought it up for you myself; and afterward he—(pointing to the calm, dignified dead)—must be attended to."

"Oh, sir, let me, I beseech you, do the

last for him! I think it would break my heart that any strange hands should touch him."

"Do as you will, Percival. But I must insist on your drinking this wine and eating these sandwiches; Mrs. Lanyon has made them herself for you."

"Her ladyship is too good, sir."

"Percival, to us your friendship is precious, and both my wife and I are only too willing to receive some of the faithful service that has helped to prolong the life of my dear uncle. Do what you will, but afterwards you must go and rest, and rest *thoroughly*."

"Ah, Master Gerald, you are just too good, and I can't bear it!"

And the old man sobbed as if his heart was broken.

"You see, sir, the old master and I grow'd up together. He was about four

years older than me, and then his love for Miss Lettice—begging your pardon, sir, for speaking of your mother—his years of silent sadness, his marriage to my lady, then the death of the bonnie young Squire—they was all as much to me as to him, nearly. Your grandfather, my master's father, died young—at least, he was no more than thirty—but it was his second wife and Master Ralph as had got all the father's love, not my master, who was by the first wife, who died, poor lady, within a year of her marriage. So you see, sir, I loved him, and that's all about it."

"I know it, Percival. Now you must eat this, and drink your wine, then settle what you think best about *him*; no one shall interfere with you."

"Is—is much of the old place destroyed, sir?" said Percival, with broken voice.

"No, Percival, it is better than we

thought; it is the servants' quarter that has suffered the most. But to-morrow I should be glad if you will go over as much as you can of it, and report to me."

"Certainly, sir!"

Gerald knew there was nothing more likely to pull the old man together than to think his services were required by "the family." So, having seen him partake of his refreshment, and kissing the cold forehead of the peaceful dead, Gerald departed to join the tired, weary people below.

It had been a night of intense excitement and anxiety. Both Hester and Esmé looked worn out, while Lady Louisa, with her bright good nature, had "mothered" the children, so as to give the younger ladies some chance of rest.

It was settled that they should for the present remain at the Manor, as Gerald wished to superintend the re-building him-

self, and the place was so large and roomy, that, beyond the moving of various articles of furniture, it would not greatly inconvenience them, and Hester's sitting-room was uninjured, so they had only to put back her things.

The funeral of the old baronet took place a week after the fire. He was buried among his ancestors, in Luscombe Church. The large throng of friends and tenantry who were present at his funeral, spoke greatly for the kind feeling existing between him and them.

When the will was read, it was found he had left everything to his "dear nephew," except some legacies. Among others, "one hundred a year to his faithful friend and servant, Percival." He commended!—Nay! he begged his nephew—as his last wish—that his servant should continue to live at Luscombe Manor as

long as he lived, and to be allowed to occupy his present apartments.

There was something almost touching in the love between these two old friends.

It is needless to say, that these injunctions were carefully carried out. And as time wore on, the load of grief was lightened, and some of the love transferred to Sir Gerald and his young son. And Percival was consoled in a certain degree, by the growing graces of the youngest scion of the House of Lanyon.

Hester was of far too noble a nature not to feel acutely the brave, unselfish conduct of Cyril Dashwood, of his almost reckless indifference, and the valuable help he had given in their hour of need.

"Mr. Dashwood! what can I say? How *can* I thank you for your bravery! As for Gerald, he cannot extol you highly enough. All I trust is, that your health

will not suffer, that your hand is not very bad."

"Lady Lanyon, you make too much of a service that any man would have rendered. And there is nothing I would not do for Lanyon, who has always thought so much more highly of me than I deserve."

"Mr. Dashwood! we all think most *highly* of you."

For the life of him he could not prevent the warm blood rushing over his face. At last she respected him! and forgave him! It restored him his self-respect, which had been wounded almost to the death.

"Ah, Cyril!" said Esmé, "what can I say? How can I thank you for my life and my child's?"

"By sending for me at anytime, if I can ever be of service, Lady Beldon."

"God bless you, Cyril! I *will* do so,"

and she held out her hand, which he held in his with warm, kindly pressure. "You *must* kiss my son before you leave," and the youthful Lanyon Beldon was brought down by his nurse, and very willingly embraced his preserver.

"What a beautiful child he is!"

So Cyril Dashwood returned to his Yorkshire home, somewhat out of sorts bodily, but mentally happier. He felt as if he had effaced the black stain that had so embittered his life a few years back. He could lift up his head once more. He could bear anything now!

CHAPTER V.

THE snow was settling in large soft flakes on the broad, dreary moorland, softening with its delicate touches cottages and trees, and making their homeliness beautiful. The red sunset tinted the old church and settled upon the Vicarage windows, and its rich, warm glow lighted up Peggy Orme's face as she stood at the church porch, her hand still holding a bunch of holly; for she had just finished decorating the church. Mrs. Fraser and the two children had already gone into the Vicarage, being somewhat cold and tired.

Cyril stood beside her. And his face, in all its clear-cut beauty, looked down eagerly on that of the girl beside him.

Two years had ripened the beauty of

Margaret Orme. It was more refined, but the clear, vigorous character looked out of her blue eyes with honest, unmistakable feeling.

"Even if you only loved me a little, could you not make up your mind—if only for the old home—and once more reign as its mistress? You know how it wants you, how *I* want you, Peggy! Think of my dull, lonely life; and how it is in your power, and in yours alone, to brighten it!"

"Mr. Dashwood, *much* as I love this place, and my old home, not even for *them* would I accept your offer if I did not love you!"

"Then you do love me? Oh! Peggy!" And he threw the pieces of holly down out of her hand and possessed himself of both.

"Yes! for some time past I have loved you."

"And I never knew," he said reproachfully.

"It was not for me to say," she answered with a sweet blush.

"Ah! well. It doesn't matter now. What a lovely Christmas Eve! The joy bells are ringing in my heart this night." He gave her one heart-felt kiss. And then they both went in to the Vicarage.

Was it the setting sun or some inner light that made their faces so beautiful as they entered the study?

Mrs. Fraser looked kindly at them. She loved Peggy Orme, and she had known her for years. So she guessed it was the old, old story told afresh! And for her young friend's sake she was glad.

Once more Peggy played the hostess.

"What would you say, Mrs. Fraser, if I were to ask you to make me a Christmas present? *Something* you valued very much!"

"I think, Mr. Dashwood, I should give it you. Yes! and feel that the gift will bring an infinite blessing with it. Also it will be in the right place!"

"Ah! you have guessed," said he joyfully.

"Yes. I have guessed. You know—

> "Love is blind, and lovers cannot see
> The pretty follies that themselves commit."

The two little girls looked mystified. They thought their dear Mr. Dashwood was just—a little—rude—to ask for a Christmas present when there was one absolutely on the road, in the shape of a large hamper-full. Oh! full of every earthly (in their eyes) enjoyment. But he should not have asked for it! No; they put their wise little heads together, and both decided it was against the canons of all good conduct to *ask* for things!

Presently Miss Orme rose and kissed Mrs. Fraser.

"How sweet of you!" whispered she.

"Dearest, you deserve it, and it would have so pleased your father."

"Now, young ladies, suppose, before you go home, we have 'snap dragon'?"

They forgave him on the spot! He really couldn't be bad to propose "snap dragon!"

So the delighted children shrieked and screamed with pleasure, and it was with some difficulty they at last took farewell of the fascinating study and its contents.

Mrs. Fraser, with kindly tact, went into the carriage, and coaxed the young girls in with her.

"But, why doesn't Peggy come?"

"Do you not remember, children, it is her old home? Think how she must love it!"

"Of course, she does, poor dear Peggy!"

"I daresay she is running in and out every room!"

Instead of which, Cyril had run upstairs, and returned breathless, but with a beautiful sapphire ring in his hand.

"Dearest, it was my mother's, and she left it for 'my wife.'"

"Cyril, is it not too good for me, too beautiful?"

"Peggy!"

"I have never had a ring in my life, we never had any money for rings," said she with a laugh.

"This is the beginning of rings, then," said he gaily. "I must say, I like to see a pretty hand jewelled. It is the right thing in the right place."

"Cyril, I *must* go. If Mrs. Fraser were not the dear sweet creature she is, she would be tired out, and cross. Good-

bye." And before he could say one word, she had run on before, and was in the carriage. He was just in time to say a hearty "*au revoir!*" and they were off. He heard Mrs. Fraser say, "never mind," and wave her hand, but he was very happy, so he did not mind.

There was no shame, no drawback in this love— No, he felt proud of it all. She was no rich heiress—her riches were her own bright, sweet nature, strong and reliable, true and steadfast.

How pleased the villagers would be! He longed to rush down the street, and tell them; but it was premature, and not dignified. No, they would know it in good time—but as soon as possible, that was only fair to them.

So, instead, he sat by his study fire, conjuring up sweet visions and dreaming pleasant dreams.

He had almost come to love this village home. The trivial tasks, the daily round, had ceased to weary him. The fact was, the Vicarage, by some strange sympathetic influence, always spoke of Peggy, and Peggy was always a sweet thought. So that, in fact, it was all identified with her —the village, the church, the house, the garden, it was always her—till at last the theme became love, and now the love was to bear fruition.

While he was thus musing, the fire of song was kindled outside! for the choir boys sang "Nowell, Nowell," and presently "Good King Wenceslas!" that quaintest and oldest of Christmas Carols. It pleased him beyond measure, it seemed a serenade of hope and joy—also it gratified him, they sang so well! in their clear high, boyish voices, and all his own training. He opened the door, and thanked

them, and told them to get nuts and cakes from old Jane, who grumbled, but gave nevertheless. You see, she had no high strain of joy to sustain her, and it meant additional cake making! But Cyril was a man who would always be obeyed in his own household. But certainly, that night, there was peace and good will. And the bells rang it out, and it floated over to Moor Hall, as Peggy was preparing for rest. And as she looked over the white world outside, the refrain entered her heart.

CHAPTER VI.

The "City of Tralee" came in, the steamer Sir Ernest Beldon was to arrive by. Esmé with Sir Gerald and Lady Lanyon, were down at the wharf to receive him, but no Sir Ernest appeared; then Sir Gerald, saw the Captain—Sir Ernest's name was on the list of passengers, his passage was paid, but he had failed to put in appearance, when the ship started, neither had his luggage come on board—they had waited to the last moment, but, as they were carrying the mails, they started exactly at the appointed time.

The shock to Esmé was terrible! And both Sir Gerald and his wife were full of the gravest anxiety on her account. And the mystery surrounding the young

Baronet, caused them unqualified uneasiness. His last letter, dated Sydney, November 14th, informed them he should start in the "City of Tralee," leaving Sydney November 20th, and it was now the second week in January! No telegram had arrived to account for this non-appearance.

Gerald at once telegraphed to the solicitors, Grey and Fisher, for information concerning him. They telegraphed back that they knew nothing of his movements. He had informed them he intended to return to England by the mail steamer, "City of Tralee," and of course concluded he had sailed. They had seen nothing of him since the first week in November. They would go to his hotel, and telegraph results, if any.

The shock to Lady Beldon had been most serious, her second child died as it

saw the light, but it was her health, that caused the most terrible anxiety to her friends. They almost feared for her reason. She felt persuaded some terrible fatality had overtaken her husband. And this retarded her convalescence to such a degree, they really feared the worst results.

They thought over everything that could be suggested. Week after week went on, and no news from the absent man. Cyril Dashwood, as one of her friends, was informed of all these terrible events. And one morning they were very much surprised at receiving a letter from him. It ran thus:—

"Moor Town Vicarage, Jan. 28th.

"DEAR LANYON,

"When I married, a fortnight ago, the daughter of the late vicar of this parish, Miss Orme, you were in quite too

much trouble for me to enter into my own affairs, however happy. Since then I have been thinking with great interest and sadness of Lady Beldon's terrible troubles. I, with my wife's full consent, have settled, if agreeable to you all, to go over and seek for the missing man. My wife's uncle, Dr. Thomas, will, with her help, work this little parish. I can get leave from the Bishop for six months. Suggest this, and let me hear your opinion at once. Your sincere friend, "CYRIL DASHWOOD."

"It is most noble of him," said Hester, warmly.

"I quite think so," replied Sir Gerald. "How does Esmé seem to-night?"

"The nurse tells me she has gone into a profound sleep—almost the first natural sleep she has had since the poor little baby was born."

"It may be the saving of her. On no account must she be disturbed."

"Is it not strange she never asks for the dear little Lanyon? So much as she idolised him too!"

"Her mind is full of one idea, and everything else is an impertinence as it were."

"We will wait and see how she seems in the morning, before telling her of his generous, unselfish offer, for it is that; leaving his bride, his home, to go a journey of thousands of miles for the sake of a man he knew little of!"

"I think it is for Esmé's sake!" said Hester gently. "He sees, too, our great anxiety for her, and her reason; and, as a friend who is deeply interested, offers to bear his share.

"You put it admirably, dearest wife."

"Now, Gerald dear, I am going up to

the nursery to see my little son, and Esmé's little darling. Poor little man, he is always asking for his mother."

"Poor little innocent!" said Gerald kindly. You must for the present give him a share of your large heart."

"Rest assured of that."

Just as Hester had made this remark, Percival put his head in the door. "If you please, my lady, little Master Beldon is crying for his mother, and won't be pacified—the nurse fears it might wake her ladyship."

"Thank you, Percival, I will go up at once." And Hester left the room.

"Come here, Percival; I want to ask your advice," said Sir Gerald.

It was only some trivial matter, but it pleased the old fellow. Gerald had made him a sort of major-domo—he liked to feel a little importance.

Lady Beldon's sleep lasted till quite late morning, and when she awoke there was a complete change in her.

"Tell Lady Lanyon I wish to see her, nurse, particularly! if you please."

"Yes, my lady," replied the woman, looking at her with some surprise; but she went out, nevertheless, and did her bidding.

Hester came at once.

"Darling, you are better! Thank God!"

"Yes, Hester, better; but I have something so strange to tell. You will leave us, nurse, if you please, for the present."

The nurse would have much liked to have heard this "strange story," but Lady Beldon waited calmly till the door closed on her.

"Now, Hester, listen! I had the strangest dream last night. I thought I saw Ernest start on some voyage—not the one home—but, somewhere near Sydney, I

suppose, there was a terrible fog, then a collision, and the crew and passengers—I don't seem to remember how many there were—sank, Ernest among the number. Some one picked him up in a boat—he was insensible, bruised, bleeding; he was taken somewhere, perhaps to Sydney. Now listen, this is the strangest part, he was robbed of every penny, and whatever the sea had left—such as rings. He became delirious—no one knew who he was, but he was taken to some horrid, dirty back street, and there he lies now," she continued, with increased eagerness. "In my dream I saw this miserable room, with a wretched pallet, an old chair, hardly a gleam of light. And he called 'Esmé! Esmé!' nothing more—only he calls me! And now, dearest Hester, my mind is made up! Before this week is over I shall go out to search for my husband!"

"But, dearest child——?"

"No, Hester, put no obstacle in my way, is it for you to say it (the dream) was not sent for my guidance?"

"But you are not strong enough."

"I shall be strong enough when my work begins. Now, darling Hester, this is my unalterable decision; it is for you and Gerald to make it as easy as you can. And Oh! Hester, take care of my precious child! —love him like your own! Swear this!"

"I swear it, love! Esmé, very strangely this letter came from Cyril Dashwood. Read it, love!"

"Hester, does it not all point one way? I gratefully accept his offer. Shall I take old Mrs. Spence? I shall not require any maid," she said, somewhat grimly. "Mrs. Spence is not too old to be of use, and she is fond of me, and will help me *if he* is ill. Now will you go and tell Gerald all this,

and beg him at once to communicate with Mr. Dashwood, and to find out how soon he can sail. Have *no fear* for me, my strength has come; I know I am doing right. What a noble woman Cyril's wife must be. May God bless her for her goodness to me! Now go, dear, and tell Gerald at *once*—it brooks no delay."

With a gentle kiss Hester left the room, greatly perplexed and moved. She told her husband at once.

"I think she is in the right. I do not see that we ought to thwart her, even if we had the right, which we have not. Were she to be denied it might drive her mad. As it is, if Cyril goes with her, and Mrs. Spence, she will be cared for."

"Then you do not forbid it?"

"Certainly not! I have just said she is his wife. It strikes me Hester, if I were lost you would seek me."

"Aye! that I would."

"Well, she is going on her quest. I will write to Dashwood, write to the shipping agents, and do you write for Mrs. Spence and begin Esmé's arrangements."

From that morning Lady Beldon seemed endowed with new strength. Her face was as pale as a lily, but her mouth and eyes showed no weakness. She laid all her plans, completed all her arrangements, gave orders about Heminglee—in fact, Hester watched her with amazement. She could hardly realise that this self-contained young girl could be her little cherished rose-bud, on whom the winds of Heaven were never allowed to blow too roughly. They seemed almost to have changed places.

The Baby Lanyon followed his mother about like a shadow. She would take him up every now and then, kiss him passionately, and then steadily go on with her work.

At last the day came for them to sail. Once more Gerald Lanyon and his wife were on board the large steamer, seeing to every possible detail for Esmé. Mrs. Spence, in a workmanlike manner, was selecting and arranging for stowing their luggage in the most convenient places. Cyril was aiding the woman to the best of his powers. Then the visitors had to leave, and Hester, with her eyes blinded with tears, watched the face of her darling as it looked down from the side of the great ship. And they both noticed there was no tears, but the sort of look that a saint might wear—pure, strong and brave. Then Cyril came and gently led her away. And Sir Gerald and Lady Lanyon turned with sad hearts and eyes full of tears.

"Cyril," Lady Lanyon had said before

starting, "I am going down to see your wife, if I may?"

"If you may! Lady Lanyon; it is just like your goodness! It will give me heart-felt happiness."

Leaving Lady Beldon on her journey across the wide seas with her trusty squire, it will be as well to return to our other friends.

CHAPTER VII.

Colonel and Mrs. Luttrell had returned from their long visit abroad, and had taken up their abode for the season in Cavendish Square. And Sabina was now with them, that young lady having declined to return to India, until—well—until a certain event came off, to wit, her marriage to Arthur Lord Frampton. It was she and not him who had postponed the marriage; she was a wild little bird who declined to be caged, with certainly no large amount of heart, but with plenty of common sense, not to allow any other woman to walk off with her lord. She kept him in a perpetual state of anxiety with her endless flirtations. He was always in terror that some other "fellow" would walk off with his pretty

bride elect, for she was as graceful and piquant as a young fawn.

He had tried manfully to "pull himself together," and his unfortunate eye-glass had been completely abolished by his imperious little mistress.

"I hate it," she had said, "It's quite time enough when you are old; when you really can't see, why you must have spectacles of course, but if you persist in going about with one glass in your eye, I will go about with two!"

"On no consideration, Sabina, to hide your beautiful eyes would be a sin."

"Well, don't hide your one. I do not say they are beautiful, but they might be worse.

Whenever he found his lady-love in a propitious mood, he would urge on his marriage. "Ladies always require so much *trousseau* business, do pray, dear, begin."

"There is no hurry whatever, Arthur we shall see plenty of each other all our lives."

Poor Lord Frampton! He really was a kind hearted, if not very brilliant young fellow, and this tantalising little *amour rebelle* caused him at times real pain. At last he took courage, and asked Mrs. Luttrell to intercede, so as to have some definite arrangement made.

"It would be no good *my* saying anything, Lord Frampton, but I will suggest it to her uncle."

"Do, dear Mrs. Luttrell, and make me your debtor for ever."

She laughed gaily as she looked at his fair forlorn face.

So that evening (Sabina being at a concert), after the dinner was over and the fragrant coffee was steaming on her little table, she broached the subject to him.

"Selwyn! Lord Frampton being in despair, wants you to *try* and persuade Sabina to fix a day for her marriage; he says they have been engaged over a year, and he seems no nearer to it than then!"

"Poor fellow! I know too well the aggravation of your sex, have I not suffered for it?"

"And haven't you been rewarded? you ungrateful monster!"

"*That* I have, but it does not prevent my having a fellow feeling for the poor wretch."

"Dear Selwyn, why does the poet say 'Men were ever gay deceivers?' You know they *must* have earned that character, otherwise Shakespeare would not have immortalised that failing in your sex. So, after all, we are only rendering dramatic justice when some of us are a little restive.

'If ladies be but young and fair
They have the gift to know it.'"

"That they most certainly have, both in your own person, Mrs. Luttrell, and in Sabina. *You* know your own power certainly."

"Are you any the worse for it, speaking individually?"

"No! a thousand times better," said he, with animation.

"Then rest satisfied, *mon beau sabreur*."

"And about Sabina?"

"I must have a little talk. In fact, as it happens I have a slight lever, which will, I believe, bring up her intentions to our level. The last letter from her father, Judge Maitland, insists on her returning. They—that is to say, Ellen and George—long to see her. She was always the spoilt one, and the most delicate. They would be so delighted to have her home again."

"That ought to be sufficient, Selwyn."

"I think it will; I must have a serious

talk with her. What time is the concert over, dear?"

"A little after ten. Lady Laura will drop her here about eleven."

"Well then I will wait up for her, and you go to bed, dear."

"My dear Selwyn, considering it is only nine o'clock, allow me to inform you I have not the faintest idea of retiring *before* ten. I think this fire, my armchair, my book, and I will throw in your cigar, quite too pleasant to leave."

"Edith! Do believe I did not think of banishing *you*, the presiding genius."

"Any way, dear, it is exceedingly comfortable."

And with a little kiss, which she blew over to him on the tips of her fingers, she drew her chair round to the fire, and began to read her book. He looked at her for some time, and then rose and

leant over her chair and kissed her, as he whispered:

"Beshrew my heart, but it is wondrous strange;
Since there is something more than witchcraft in them,
That masters e'en the wisest of us all."

"Now, Selwyn, I insist upon you leaving the poets alone. Let us return to our prose. And it isn't bad prose, after all."

"It can never be where you are, Edith. What are you reading, wife?"

"Monsieur Jourdain's discovery. That he has been talking prose all his life without knowing it."

"Ah! I remember reading Molière, years ago."

"He gives me each time I read him renewed pleasure," said Mrs. Luttrell, "and I think his fat ignorant old (no, he is only 40) Bourgeois is splendid. Listen, Selwyn!

"Monsieur the Philosopher suggests he should learn *La Morale*.

"He naturally enquires what that is.

"'Qu' est-ce qu'elle dit cette morale?'

"'Elle traite de la félicité enseigne aux hommes à modeur leurs passion,' etc.

"'Non! Laissons cela. Je suis billeux comme tous les diables; et il n'y a Morale qui tienne. Je me veux mettre en colere tout mon foô, quand il 'en prend envie.'

"He objects to bind himself to amiability of temper."

"After all," said Colonel Selwyn with a laugh, "he isn't a fool, because if I remember correctly, he asks them to teach him 'L'Orthographe.' I think he learns A E I O U."

"Yes, and then he says:"

"'Quoi quand je dis. Nicole, appretez-moi mes pantoufles, et me donnez mon bonnet de nuits, c'est de la Prose?'"

"'Oui, Monsieur.'"

"'Pas ma foi: il y' plus de quarante ans que je dis de la Prose, Sans que j'en susse rien. Et je vous suis le plus obligé du monde.'"

"Ah! Molière was a clever satirist. I conclude, Selwyn, it is the role of most dramatists to show up the faults of 'Society,' and somehow I don't think we mind in the least being scolded collectively. Though one might resent it individually, because we almost enjoy it, when we all get it, it is so pleasant to feel yourself no worse than other people."

Then she resumed her book.

"Fancy having a servant like 'Nicole!' Would she not be a curiosity in these nineteenth century days? She *is* so amusing."

"My dear! You would object to her very plain speaking. Do you remember, Edith, in one of his plays* Molière tells us a girl called Andree breaks a glass, and her mistress, the Countess, says she shall pay for it—and she agrees to do so, and then

* "La Comtesse D'Escarbagnas," 1672.

La Comtesse calls her a few unpleasant names, and Andree says:

"'Dame! Madame! Si je paye, je ne vieux point étre quereliée.'

"Fancy, John Thomas, or Mary answering us in that fashion!"

"You may depend upon it they 'think' it, though their training as 'automatons' would prevent their giving vent to their feelings *above* stairs. Below, we know it is quite another thing, and many a reputation has been smirched by our 'hewers of wood and drawers of water.'"

"They have great power no doubt for good or evil. There is Sabina! I hear the carriage has stopped."

And in tripped Sabina, looking like a lovely snowflake in her white *sortie du bal*.

"How cosy you look, Uncle Selwyn!"

"Well, we are dear. Are you cold?"

"Not in the least."

"Your supper is on that little table, Sabina! And there is some hot coffee, if you care for it!"

"Thanks, Auntie, dear. I *am* hungry, having to sit still alone gives one an appetite!" and throwing off her wraps, Sabina sat down to her table.

She was now tall, slender, bright and pretty, with little quick movements like a bird.

"If you have finished, dear," said her Aunt, "I think I shall retire."

"What have you been doing, you lazy Auntie, to make you tired?"

"Reading Molière!"

"Oh! well! I don't wonder you are tired. All those old fossils are wearying to a degree. One gets them *ad nauseam* at school!"

"But I thoroughly enjoy it, Sabina!" said her Aunt with a smile.

"Oh!" and Miss Maitland shrugged her shoulders.

After all, there *was* no accounting for tastes!

"Good night, Aunt Edith!"

"Good night, love!" and Mrs. Luttrell, with a little significant smile to her husband, left the room.

"Who was at the concert to-night, dear?"

"Arthur, Adolphus Frampton — Lady Laura, of course—a young fellow called Chetwynd, the Veres, and many others I know, whose names I forget!"

"Sabina! have you and Frampton settled your marriage yet?"

"No, Uncle! There is no hurry!"

"No! only that your parents insist upon your returing to India at once! I have

a letter here from your father!" and he felt in his pockets. "No, it is upstairs! Your Aunt can give it you."

"Under those circumstances, I shall marry Frampton as soon as possible. So if I go to India, it shall be my honeymoon trip!"

"Does he agree to that?"

"Of course, Uncle Selwyn! Why, if I proposed the North Pole it would be quite the same thing!"

"I suppose, dear, you know best, only I think I should not try his love too far—even a worm will turn. His long devotion to you should insure *respect* and love on your part."

"Do you think I treat him badly?" said she, opening her large dark eyes as if the idea had never struck her before.

"Well, Sabina, I do!"

Her Uncle Selwyn spoilt her. He never

thwarted her in anything reasonable. So to hear this strongly expressed opinion from one so usually indulgent, rather surprised her.

"You will have to decide, dear!"

"I will quite decide to-morrow, dear old Uncle!"

"That's right, my pretty pet," and he kissed her affectionately on her forehead, and then she left the room.

He smiled to himself at the finish of the little diplomatic adroitness he had displayed.

"Frampton will thank me, I expect! She is almost as pretty as Edith, and very nearly as saucy. They are dear torments both of them."

CHAPTER VIII.

PEGGY, otherwise Mrs. Cyril Dashwood, was sitting in the little study, sacred to her husband. Her two young sisters, "The Twins," were on a long visit to the Vicarage, for Polly had gone to Moor Hall to replace Peggy, and the little girls during their brother-in-law's absence were to remain with their sister. Anything more joyful to these children could hardly be imagined, they felt so truly grateful to their rather severe-looking brother-in-law for leaving dear, darling Peggy for their own use.

"Christie, should you mind very much if *he* (meaning Cyril Dashwood) were *never* to come home again?"

"Not at all. If we can only stop here

for *ever*, I should prefer him being millions of miles away!"

"Yes, but perhaps as Peggy *is* Mrs. Cyril Dashwood now, we had better not tell anyone, in case he *should* come home, you know!"

"No!" So they said nothing to Peggy, only enjoyed their hearts' content in the old garden and the old home.

"Their great-uncle, a kindly, simple old man, who had always been a cathedral hack, was glad of the quiet and rest of this secluded Yorkshire moor. His niece was good and tender to him. He thought his new nephew "quixotic" to a degree; but, on the other hand, it gave *him* a pleasant change. Very little was expected of him, for Mrs. Dashwood saw to everything in the little parish. To have Miss Peggy back again was too good to be at first realised. But there she was! in and out

their houses with the little girls at her heels, just like old times; all they wanted was t'old Parson. But they admitted "Parson was getting to be real nice and friendly, all along of Miss Peggy though."

Peggy was busy over some winter garments for her little sisters, when they rushed in breathlessly: "Sister! there's a strange carriage coming across the moor. Not the Hall carriage."

"It must be someone going on to Black-moor."

"But they might have gone nearer by train."

"So they might, but you see, dears, I do not know, so it's hardly worth while puzzling it out. Put some coals on, Mousie."

This done, Mousie and Christie vanished again to watch the progress of the strangely fascinating, mysterious carriage. On it came; now it had reached the Rectory

gate—it stopped, and out of it alighted a tall, stately lady, who with a pleasant smile asked to see Mrs. Dashwood.

The little girls, exceedingly awed, ran on in front to tell their sister.

Peggy came out at once.

"I am Lady Lanyon, your husband's friend, for I am sure you are Mrs. Dashwood, from his description."

"Yes, I am Mrs. Dashwood," said Peggy with a pretty blush.

"I am so glad to make your acquaintance," said Lady Lanyon with great friendship, and these are the two little sisters?"

"Yes, Christina and Helen. Please come in, Lady Lanyon, and let your fly go round to the stables."

So Hester went into the pleasant little study, and Peggy put her work on one side, drew the cosiest chair for her visitor, and made her feel thoroughly at home.

Hester was charmed with the bonnie little wife, so straightforward, so honest.

"I suppose you heard, as we did, from Malta?"

"Yes, Cyril said they were all well; that Lady Beldon had borne the voyage better than could have been expected. She was not ill at all—and Cyril was," said his wife, with a smile.

"We are anxiously awaiting a letter from Suez, and, oh! Mrs. Dashwood, we do think it so noble of you to spare your husband."

"Nay, Lady Lanyon; it was a duty he told me he owed to himself, and to Lady Beldon and you, to help in some way to clear up this terrible mystery."

Hester knew better than his wife what he meant, but all she said was:

"It is most generous on his part, and we all appreciate his devotion and your unselfishness."

And then they fell to talking over many things and foreign places, where both had been, over the hospital at Langton, the little parish here, and, after Hester had enjoyed her tea, seen the old Vicar's grave, the church, the principal street in the parish, left a handsome sum with the Vicar's wife for any parish or charitable purposes, the two ladies parted, both mutually pleased with each other.

"With such a friend as Lady Lanyon I do not wonder Cyril has such noble ideas!"

Sweet, tender Peggy!

"Has she asked you to her grand house, Peggy?" asked Christie.

"She has, dear; but I shall wait till Cyril comes home, and then I *should* like to go and see her."

"She didn't ask us, I suppose?"

"Well, no, not just yet, but I am sure

she will when she knows what dear little sisters you are."

"But perhaps you think us nice because you love us, Peggy?"

"Perhaps, darlings. Well, now about those frocks; suppose you try yours on, Mousie!"

And as, after all, the matter of garments is absorbing to the feminine mind, however youthful, and as these especial ones were to be donned for forthcoming festivities at Moorhall, Lady Lanyon was forgotten for the time, and Peggy's busy, skilful fingers were in full request.

So, with perpetual little glancings at the photograph of Cyril's beautiful face, taken just at their marriage, she worked with light heart, thankful that a beneficent Providence had placed her in the haven where she would be.

CHAPTER IX.

Lady Beldon, Mr. Dashwood, and Mrs. Spence landed safely in Sydney, and drove to one of the best hotels. After some little resh and refreshment, Cyril set out to discover Messrs. Grey and Fisher. Eventually they were found; but it was some distance from the hotel. These gentlemen were quite as perplexed at the strange disappearance of Sir Ernest Beldon as the members of his own family.

"We saw a great deal of him before the time came for his departure for England. We find that just before he left his hotel, 'The Empress,' about two days before the ship sailed, a telegram came—though where from, or who from, we cannot find out. He told the hotel people he was going away

on business, but should be back in time for the 'City of Tralee'; but not to send his luggage on board till he returned. This caused no surprise whatever. So he left, taking only with him a small bag and some wraps."

"Had he his watch and his usual trinkets, such as pin-rings?" asked Mr. Dashwood.

"Oh! yes. Exactly as he always was dressed."

"Can you imagine he had any enemies in the place? I mean people who might resent his coming into the large fortune he did? Any relations out here of the late Mr. Stratton?"

"None whatever. As far as we know he had no relations except Sir Ernest and his sister, Lady Willis. We have been Mr. Stratton's legal advisers for years, and know he had no other relations."

"Do you imagine he has met with foul play?"

They did not answer immediately.

"You see," said Mr. Fisher, "it is a very difficult thing to say. What could have been the motive of this telegram? We have seen the manager in connection with the sheep run and the agent for the Sydney property. Sir Ernest *had* made every possible arrangement with them; indeed, he told them he should return by-and-by and bring his wife out as well. They have neither seen nor heard anything of him since. A reward has been offered for him; but, as yet, with no result."

"Could we have a detective?"

"Oh, certainly. We can recommend one who has served us well in many cases."

This was rather unsatisfactory news to take to Lady Beidon. She was sitting at

the window of the hotel anxiously watching for him to return.

He told her the result of the interview.

"If we can get this detective man to go with us, he may take us to all the likely places where a poor waif or stray might be taken in. For I am *sure* that's what he is now," said poor Esmé, with a break in her voice.

"Anyway, we will begin the search for him to-morrow morning."

But he thought what a vague chance it was. Only a woman's dream! The detective Davies came early. A homely, civil-looking person, and the three set out.

Day after day passed with no success. But on the fifth day, Mr. Davies came in again one evening, rather late, to say that at the low part of the town he had heard of a man having been picked up at sea! It might be worth while to go

and see him. "But it's hardly a fit place for a lady."

"Never mind *what* the place is, I shall go."

Again they began their weary search. They found a rough-looking object, who scowled at them, and was ex eedingly suspicious of the whole party.

He was questioned minutely if he had heard of any gentleman being lost in a fishing boat, or picked up outside the harbour. But to these questions he maintained a dogged silence.

Presently, Mr. Davies speaking with deliberate meaning, addressed the man who had continued to smoke in contemptuous silence.

"Tom Heenan, I think it will pay you best to tell anything you *do* know."

At the sound of his name, the man roused himself with wonderful alacrity.

"What do you know about Tom Heenan?"

"A great deal more than you think for or would care to hear. But on *this occasion* it's all straight and above board."

"If you can give any help towards finding this here gent, that we feel *sure* is stowed away somewhere, it *might* be something in your pocket, and as I said before *this time* it won't have anything to do with the 'other affair,'" said the detective, significantly.

Tom Heenan looked with intent scrutiny at the other's face.

"Are you quite sure you mean it?"

"Quite sure. The 'other affair' must look out for itself *afterwards*."

The man nodded his head and reflected.

"How much?"

"Twenty pounds!"

"Gold down?"

"Yes!"

"When?"

"Directly we find the missing man!"

"Oh, I will give you something handsome, only do, do tell me, if you know!"

And the man stared at the lovely beseeching face.

"What's he to you?" he asked gruffly.

"My husband!"

"Oh!"

And a cunning smile stole over his face.

"Well, it's just possible I can put yer in the way, but I shall want more than twenty pounds!"

"You shall have it; only do not let us waste time!"

"There ain't no hurry for me!" he said with aggravating calmness.

"Now look here, Tom Heenan," said the detective. "I don't think you'll gain over much by having *too* long a rope, it

might be worse for you. Take my advice, close with the party, their offer is very handsome, and let us have the gent at once, it might be safer for you if you *was* wanted?"

This argument seemed to have some weight.

"I shan't move till I get the money?"

"I will go to the bank at once, and bring it back with me," said Cyril.

"How much?"

"One hundred pounds in gold," said the scrowling Heenan; "not a penny less."

"Oh yes, yes;" said Lady Beldon, feverishly, "only make haste, Cyril."

Cyril swiftly went off, took a cab, and hastened to the Bank. To Esmé it seemed hours.

He came back with the gold in a canvas bag, and as it was counted out on the table the ruffian's eyes gloated over it.

He was going to sweep it all into the bag again.

"With your permission, Mr. Heenan," said the detective politely, "we will keep back fifty to be paid on the delivery of the gent. Fair is fair!"

Seeing he could not get the whole sum, he muttered something like an oath.

"Come on, then!"

They followed their odious cicerone down alleys and slums indescribable till they came to one street. Suddenly Lady Beldon cried out:

"It is *here!* I *know* it. I feel it is here."

Tom Heenan looked at her in amazement.

"*This* is the room I saw," she said, turning excitedly to Cyril. "At last!"

The man lifted the latch. They entered, Lady Beldon first.

Seated by the fire was a man, who looked more like a skeleton than anything else. His head was bent on his chest; he did not raise it even as the door opened. Lady Beldon paused for one moment with a look of horror, and then went forward. With a self-restraint that was almost agony she went softly to the silent figure. Very gently she whispered:

"Ernest!"

Very slowly and with great effort the face was raised, the dim eyes looked out of their hollow circles.

"Ernest, darling, don't you know your Esmé?"

Then gradually a dawning of reason and light entered, and two large tears coursed each other down the thin, wan face.

"Esmé! Wife! Esmé!"

She clasped her arms round him, and kissed him, and smoothed his tangled hair;

but again restrained her feelings, for she feared even now he might vanish into the realms of death.

Directly Cyril saw they had found the poor lost wanderer, he handed the man the other fifty pounds, who no sooner received it than he simply vanished. The detective smiled as the door closed softly on him. There was a woman in the room, whom they had hardly remarked. She had been a silent spectator of the whole transaction. No one saw the bitter smile on her face as the ruffian clutched the gold and disappeared.

"How came this gentleman here and in this plight?" asked Cyril of the woman.

"The man you have just paid brought him here."

"What has happened to him?"

"He was decoyed on a little trading vessel, but, owing to a fog, it came into

collision with a steamer and sunk. They (the vessel's crew) were all drowned except that man and this poor creature, and I—I saved him, because he's my own flesh and blood!"

"*What?*"

"He is Sir Ernest Beldon! I am Mr. Stratton's illegitimate daughter. That man you have paid is my husband!"

The astonishment at this revelation can be imagined.

"My father for years has sent me sums of money, but that ruffian hearing that all the money was to go to a stranger, determined to seize him and make him pay a large sum for his liberty! but the time he was in the water, and a frightful attack of typhoid fever, took the senses out of him, he forgot who he was. Heenan was for doing away with him! (they shuddered as they heard this) but I determined if I

could to save him, and told Heenan I would round upon him for something else."

The detective nodded—he knew what the "something else" was!

"But this poor chap's been as nigh death, as can be, he ain't up to much now."

"Has he had a doctor?"

"A doctor! answered the woman scornfully, we don't have no doctors down here! They die or they lives! which ever turns up."

"Anyway I feel sure you have done your *best* for him," said Lady Beldon, going up and taking the woman's hands in hers. "How can I thank you. What can I do in return for saving his life?"

"Just nothing but let me alone."

"Would you go back to England with us? Think of a pleasant little home all

your own. You shall never want for anything. Some of your father's money shall be yours, only say you will come."

For a moment the woman's face softened as there passed through her thoughts a vision of peace and rest. Then it hardened again.

"What did you come out for, my Lady?"

"To find my husband!"

"Well, I stop here, for mine."

She went to a drawer, and pulled out some old rags, and out of them she produced a gold locket.

"Do you know that?"

"Ah, yes! it is Ernest's. I gave it him."

"Well, if you want to give me anything, give me that."

"Do you know my portrait is there too."

"No!"

"See," and Esmé opened a spring, and her own lovely face, taken more than two years back, shone out."

"Will you give it me?"

"Yes! And may God reward you and bless you."

During this time Cyril had sent for a conveyance. A little brandy and a large grey shawl, for the poor young baronet's attire consisted of rags, and he seemed cowering with cold. The cab was at the door, so Cyril asked the woman for some water, and bathed the sick man's face and gave him some brandy and water, then carried him out, placing him with gentle movement in the most convenient position. Lady Beldon just stayed one minute, and putting out her hand, took the woman's hand in farewell, and kissed her on her forehead. What gold could not do that kiss did, for the fountain of her heart,

crushed and seared by sin and misery, rushed forth, her hot tears flew fast, and all she could say was, "I am not worthy! I am not worthy!" And shut the door quickly.

Esmé supported the poor wreck of what was once a strong man. They got him to the hotel, and put him to bed—then they sent for the doctors, who pronounced him in a state of frightful weakness and wasting fever; but if he had good nursing, good nourishment, and no excitement, he might recover.

Before Esmé let the detective go, she charged him to go back again to the woman, Heenan's wife, and *beseech* her to accept something, if only a hundred pounds.

"Oh, it would make me happy."

"I'll go, my lady, never fear! but as sure as my name is Bill Davies, the bird will have flown. *If* she's there I'll make her

take the money; if she isn't, well! I'll bring it back."

"Any way, Davies, *you* shall have one hundred pounds."

His eyes sparkled with intense pleasure.

"Then I am yours to command."

And he went forthwith.

Thank you! What was it to her? All she had would count as nothing for her husband's life.

Lady Beldon returned to her poor invalid, who watched her with languid eyes, but never spoke to any of them. Indeed, to keep him alive was as much as they could do.

The next day Cyril went out and telegraphed to England the glad news "he had been found." And Mr. Davies likewise turned up with the information that the woman had gone, as he had anticipated.

"It is yours, then, and thank you much."

"Them English are real swells, I will say that for 'em. No meanness—they know a man's worth at a glance. He then went on to Grey and Fisher, and informed them of all the *dénouement*, and of the story, and the fact of Mrs. Heenan's existence. This took them much by surprise. After all do we *ever* know that 'hidden self' of our neighbours, or they ours? I venture to say no! emphatically; everyone has his own inner history that never comes to the surface—unless by the unforseen.

Mr. Stratton had had a history which had caused him years of worry—which he kept to himself. Even his lawyers knew nothing of it.

It was more a work of time and nursing, than anything else with regard to Sir Ernest. Nothing could exceed the devotion of his three willing nurses—his wife, Cyril Dashwood, and good solid

Mrs. Spence; each of these three brought all their hearts, all their skill, all their love to bear on this poor broken specimen of humanity. Gradually the attenuated form recovered flesh—the dim eyes became brighter—but even now he talked but little; he seemed to have a dislike to speak—but his eyes hitherto not so remarkably expressive — expressed everything. With what looks of love did he watch his graceful pretty wife. He could hardly bear her out of his sight. And Cyril, once his rival, now his trusted friend —he seemed by his clear intuition to understand it all. And Mrs. Spence, with her large good-natured figure, who thought nothing a trouble, if the "Squire" was only pleased. On his thin wasted face there was always a smile, when she loomed in the distance with her good beef tea, or her jelly.

"Now, sir! do please to look sharp and get well, because all the jam wants seeing to; and, as I reckon it, we ought to be back, say end of June, so as to give me plenty of time. You see, sir, July is always a busy time for cooks." He would answer not a word, but a faint smile would come and go.

He did get sufficiently strong to embark on the mail steamer "Palmatta," and it did get to England about June, as Mrs. Spence had accurately summed up.

The voyage did wonders for him, and when Gerald and Hester met them at the Docks, accompanied by Sir Percy, Lady Willis and Mr. Dashwood, they were almost shocked to see such a complete invalid, and perfectly amazed to hear he had "so improved on the voyage." What *could* he have been before?

Esmé rushed into Hester's arms too

overcome to speak. "Oh! darling Hester, thank God!"

Hortense Willis, with her eyes so full of tears she could hardly see, clung to her brother, while Sir Percy, vigorously blowing his nose, declared he would write to the *Times* and expose the bad management of the colony, &c. All the same, they had taken every care; Cyril's letter had prepared them for something like the situation.

So two carriages were in waiting, one with an invalid's bed, which held Sir Ernest, his wife and sister, with good Mrs. Spence outside, while Hester, Gerald, Sir Percy, Cyril and Mrs. Dashwood squeezed into the other.

All these nine hearts beat with one emotion; love towards each other, love that had been tried in the fire and had come out clear. To Peggy's tender heart

there came this thought, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Yes, her Cyril had earned a noble niche in the Temple of Fame. To say that she *loved* him was little, she did that, when he showed his goodness, in the summer-house, but now he was a hero, a beautiful, noble hero, and her own!

Then lovely Lady Beldon, as they parted, came up to her. "Mrs. Dashwood, nay, may I say Peggy? for your noble surrender of Cyril, who has been to me as a brother, how can I thank you? I *can* appreciate *your* sacrifice, when I feel how near *my* husband has been to the jaws of death. Some day, not now, I may be able to do so." And then she kissed her.

"God bless you, Esmé, and help you now. I think he will yet be your staff, and stay. Have patience, dear," said Cyril.

"Ah, Cyril! I owe you my child's, my

husband's and my own life! Good-bye, dear!" And she kissed him with a gentle kiss. It was a kiss so pure, so tender, so true, an angel might have given it. And, after having seen to Sir Ernest's comforts, he bade farewell to the party, and he and his wife returned to their Yorkshire home, and the rest to Heminglee.

CHAPTER X.

Langton had heard with regret of the disappearance of Sir Ernest Beldon. Some said he had been blown up, others said he had run away. Anyhow, he was *non est*. But when they heard the true version and that he had returned, from Lady Louisa, they were unfeignedly glad, for young Lady Beldon was a great favourite, and, after all, she must expect some drawbacks in life. But they were exceedingly surprised to hear that Mr. Dashwood had accompanied Lady Beldon abroad.

"A highly improper proceeding, I must say," said Mrs. Frostick. "I hear he is married, too! to go and leave his own wife. Fie! don't tell me! he went with Sir Gerald's and Lady Lanyon's sanction! I

don't *believe* it, my dear, he always was fond of Lady Beldon, only he wasn't good enongh for her! of course not! Ah, it's a bad world! a bad world!"

"Neighbour Frostick, why should you think evil like that?" said old David Brown. "To my mind, there is something real noble about that Mr. Dashwood aleaving his own young bride to go and help to find a lost man. And you may take my word for it, Sir Gerald and Lady Lanyon knows what they was a doing, better than you or me."

"My dear Brown, you're just a right down innocent. *Any* one might take you in, and some of these days you'll find it out."

"Well, neighbour, I will wait until I do. *I* think it's always wise to believe the *best* of folks. You think the worst, maybe you're right, maybe I'm wrong, but I like

to think no evil; besides, it strikes me we ain't saints ourselves."

Mrs. Frostick looked upon this as very nearly impertinence, for she considered herself, if not a saint, a very *proper* person. She went every day to church, sometimes twice on saint days. Whereas old Brown never went at all, except when his duties as churchwarden obliged him.

There was one thing old David was always longing to let out, and that was his daughter Harriet's engagement to Mr. Johnson, but his two daughters absolutely prohibited it. They knew too well the power of Mrs. Frostick's tongue. They meant to spring a mine upon her. She should not hear of it until it was a *fait accompli*. She had given them many a "bad quarter of an hour" in their life. This would make them quits. To think that David Brown's daughter should ever

marry passed her belief. So Harriet grew younger, and dressed more suitably. She really looked bright and happy, and all her trouble now was to keep Mr. Johnson by his fatuous conduct, from betraying the real state of affairs.

Percy Blythe was almost as good as the Rector, for, excepting the Sunday morning sermons, he did most of the rector's work. He really lived at the Rectory, though he still kept his own little *pied à terre*. Also, he always received, when his official salary was paid, an extra *douceur*, and a very good one it was.

His was by no means a disappointed life. Troubles can be lived down if only we pull ourselves together; it is the ever giving way to them that makes them so hard to bear. When once he found Mrs. Grantley was Mrs. Grantley no longer, he gave up the feverish wishing and longing; he would

ever love her, but it would not be a way that could injure him or her; it was a very honest loyal love that perhaps would ever prevent him loving any other women, but even time and circumstances might conspire to thwart this—*quien sabe?*

He was both amused and pleased to hear of Sabina Maitland's engagement to Lord Frampton, but he would be more than glad when it was an accomplished fact, as she considerably unsettled that very mercurial young person Adolphus Frampton, and the Rector and Lady Louisa trusted so much to his influence over this by no means brilliantly gifted young man.

Dr. and Mrs. Lewis made a most happy couple. It is marvellous what effects matrimony has on some people. Dr. Lewis seemed in some quiet way to have parted with the untidy "savant" like appearance he used to wear. He was always well

dressed—"well groomed," Adolphus said. His collection flourished, and the specimens were no longer all over the place, but arranged in one room, which his wife called the "museum," and he appreciated her neat, methodical arrangements. Dr. and Mrs. Lewis contemplated making an extensive tour abroad, and were busy making all their arrangements, for a new mayor reigned in their stead, so there was nothing in the way of official duties to prevent them doing as they liked. The Doctor understood there were some wonderful specimens to be had in Brazil, and as their time was their own, with ample means, they intended to indulge their respective tastes; he for his naturalist studies, and Mrs. Lewis for hospital and nursing institutions. Before her marriage hospital work had been a means of livelihood, now it was a question of deep interest. The committee at Lang-

ton had found her services invaluable, for she had practical knowledge, and the local doctors were more than glad of her valuable help. She recommended the matron, arranged the staff. Altogether she gave an immense impetus to the whole affair, while Sir Gerald and Lady Lanyon supported her financially, so that the scheme begun so nobly was carried out in every way satisfactorily. But they did not allow local interest to languish, for Mr. Blythe was anxious to raise the tone of—we will say the lower middle class—of the town; and before Dr. and Mrs. Lewis left for their foreign tour, there was to be a concert, and amateur theatricals, which it was particularly requested they should grace.

Now with regard to the private theatricals the Rector had taken a warm interest in them. He had been so delighted with those he had seen at his niece's, Mrs. Vere.

that he was anxious, if possible, they should be repeated at Langton.

"But, dear Rector, I do not think the 'Good-natured Man' would take down here. You see half the people know nothing about plays at all, and I fancy they would like something bright, and brisk."

"Yes, but think what good prose, what excellent English, they would get."

"True, but would they appreciate the prose? It would be all the same to them if the grammar was execrable, they would infinitely prefer a comic song, or a break down dance."

"I have it," exclaimed the Rector. 'She Stoops to Conquer!' There you have everything combined, and I am sure you have the comic element there."

Percy saw the Rector was set upon it, and after all, they could but break down

(which by-the-bye they would be sure to do), and it would be quite as amusing to the audience, who would be far more interested in the players than the play. So the Rector wrote up forthwith to his niece, Mrs. Vere, begging her, her husband, and any likely friends she might suggest to undertake the affair.

Mrs. Vere was pleased in both senses. She was very fond of her uncle, and very fond of private theatricals. So she undertook to arrange the whole thing; and would bring with her Lord Frampton, Sabina Maitland, and a Mr. Chetwynd, and one or two others.

In the programme, the concert was to come off first, on the Wednesday and the following week the theatricals.

The concert was entirely under the direction of Mr. Blythe, whose difficulty consisted in choosing from the number of

people who wished to perform. Of course, Mr. Johnson, being a nervous, hesitating man, chose a comic song, and he also stipulated that Miss Harriet Brown should do something.

Poor Percy was very doubtful of her capabilities.

"What can you sing, Miss Harriet?"

"'Twickenham Ferry,' and I could sing a duet with Mr. Johnson," said Harriet with a slight giggle.

"Oh, indeed; and what is it to be?"

"We haven't quite settled yet, perhaps it might be a trio, if you have no objection!"

"I must tell you candidly, I did not know Mr. Johnson could sing."

"No? He can, beautifully, though!"

"Well, let me hear what *you* propose singing?"

"If we have a trio, we—that is—Mr. Johnson, Tillie and I—thought—"

"Miss Tillie, can *she* sing?" said Percy aghast.

"Oh yes, very nicely. We thought of either, 'Sigh No More, Ladies,' or 'Memory.'"

Mr. Blythe's heart sunk. He could picture to himself these unfortunate three. He must consult the Rector.

"Well, Miss Harriet, if you will kindly, with your sister and Mr. Johnson, try over what you propose to sing, I shall be at your disposal in half an hour."

So with that he flew off to the Rector.

"What is to be done about them Rector?"

"Oh let them sing, by all means!"

"But I don't believe either of them have a note of music in their composition!"

"Never mind! what does it matter to you and I, if they *do* come to grief? Let the concert be as representative as possible.

You know the British public like 'something' for their shilling!"

"They will get it," said Mr. Blythe with conviction. "You are *quite* sure about the wisdom of having the two Miss Brown's and Mr. Johnson?"

"Sure! Why not? Just think of the delight of old David at seeing his daughter's name in print. Why, it will be worth the whole thing! As for Johnson, he is sure to make an ass of himself, whatever he does," said the Rector with a laugh. "I wish," he added, "we could get dear Esmé Beldon down for the night. She would take immensely. And I am told she can play. And she would make up for everybody else's break down."

"Could you not write and ask her?" said Percy eagerly; "if Sir Ernest could only spare her?"

"I will, and at once! Oh, by-the-by,

Adolphus wants to sing something in character."

"What is it?"

"I don't know the least."

Then Percy returned to his dramatis personæ. And with the exception of the chance of Lady Beldon, so far, they gave him unqualified uneasiness.

The two Browns, Mr. Johnson, and Adolphus! Suddenly he remembered Adelaide Craster sung very sweetly. To be sure, he would run round and ask her! No sooner thought than done. He found her at home and willing to help.

"Only," she said modestly, "my voice is very commonplace. But I will sing these if you care to wait and adjudicate upon me!"

And she sang, with soft, pathetic sweetness, "Robin Adair," and "My Mother Bids Me Bind my Hair."

Percy was completely surprised. No

doubt he had heard her sing dozens of times! But then his thoughts were always full of another woman.

"I don't know if I shall have courage when the time comes," she said, in answer to his warm congratulations.

"Oh, yes you will. We hope to get Lady Beldon to play, if Sir Ernest is well enough."

"That *will* be a treat! Besides, she is so sweet and lovely!"

Percy thought it strange he had never before remarked that Adelaide Craster was a very agreeable girl. Without being absolutely pretty, there was something very winning and pleasant about her face and manner. So he said, "Stick to those two songs, Miss Craster, and you will do."

She was very pleased, both at being asked and that her voice should be considered good enough.

So once more he returned to the Brown's to hear their rehearsal. The door stood open, and he was just going in when he saw Mr. Johnson, with his arm round Harriet's waist as they were singing their parts.

"Whew! That's how the land lies! Well, it's no business of mine! So, with a premonitory cough, he made himself heard. They all stood at attention. Matilda was playing and singing as well, "Sigh No More!" They sang, and he sighed, as the dull, monotonous voices blended together. No, blend they did not, for Tilly's little, thin, rasping pipe was heard above Harriet's fuller but wrong notes; while Mr. Johnson's was a very weak tenor, inclined to run into a falsetto. So altogether, both the poet and the musician were comfortably murdered, by these three satisfied people. Poor Percy

Blythe sighed heavily. How could he make headway against ignorance and vanity?

"Thank you, Miss Brown; you play the accompaniment very well. I conclude you will all three practice up till the concert comes off."

He was going to suggest they should sing without accompaniment, but the result would have been simply *too* dreadful. No, they must sing their own way. There was no help for it.

"I think they sing that *real* well," said David Brown, coming in from the parlour, where he had been having his afternoon siesta. "Lor, to think my girls can sing like that! It's right down pleasant, Mr. Blythe. I did pay a lot, 'tis true, for their schooling, but it warn't wasted, not it. Please tell the Rector I'm mighty pleased; and Mr. Johnson here" (giving him a hearty

slap which made that gentleman jump), "he's mighty good at a song; he can sing no end! What's amiss now, lass?" as Harriet gave a warning pinch; "all right, lass——"

"I am glad you are satisfied; the Rector thought you would be pleased."

"Pleased, bless yer, ain't the word. I'm proud, man!"

At any rate there was somebody satisfied. Now there was Mr. Adolphus Frampton, who was a very uncertain quantity, and upon being asked the name of his song replied; "Never you mind, old fellow; it will take with 'the gallery,'" and that was all Mr. Blythe could get out of him.

"Well, I can only do my best; but it's a sorry lot, except Lady Beldon and Adelaide Craster."

The concert was duly announced, and Mrs. Frostick took a reserved front seat.

And the evening came; she put on her best cap, her moire-antique dress of dark blue, all her gala rings, her large brooch, like a saucer, of the defunct Mr. Frostick, her yard of watch chain—of course, as she was to sit in the front row among the quality, she must do credit to the occasion. As yet she was unacquainted with the programme. However, she arrived there in ample time. Afterwards came the Rector and Lady Louisa, and with them Lady Beldon, who looked lovely, as usual, in a soft black lace dress; then Dr. and Mrs. Lewis. With the exception of Lady Beldon all the performers went into the little waiting room under the orchestra. The programmes were being sold in the room, so Mrs. Frostick bought one of course. She put on her best gold-rimmed spectacles. The grand concert was duly set forth under the patronage of several

distinguished people (who would be conspicuous by their absence).

Lady Beldon was down for an "Air de Banjo!"

"Who would have thought she could play anything so vulgar as a banjo! and a 'ballade,' by Chopin." Mrs. Frostick had never heard of Chopin, but the name did not even please her, so with a disapproving shake of her head she passed on.

"*What!*" she screamed to her neighbour, "*Brown's girls going* to sing? Look here! Miss Matilda Brown, Miss Harriet Brown, and Rev. J. Johnson, trio—'Sigh No More, Ladies.'"

She read no more; she first thought of having her money back. No! that would be silly; she was there, dressed in her best, so she would stay; but if ever there was a swindle—

The Rector came on the platform and

made a few opening remarks, and then led on Lady Beldon, who was received with vociferous cheering.

Her "Air de Banjo" pleased the audience greatly, the gods keeping time with their feet; indeed they would have liked it all over again.

Then came Mr. Johnson's "Comic Song," which he sung in the most dreary manner possible; it was politely ignored by the audience. They did not express any disapproval—that was something, thought Percy.

Then Adelaide Craster, with her pretty, timid manner, began "Robin Adair." At first she was very nervous, but gathering courage she rendered the old ballad charmingly, and received tremendous applause. It suited this country audience, with its old symplicity. Now the grand trio was to come off, Mrs. Frostick put on her

spectacles and glared at the three, as they one by one came on the platform. Lady Beldon played the accompaniment. They began; presently a small titter was heard, and as they got through it somehow or another, the audience fairly roared; there was, as the reporters would have said, "ironical cheering." Old Brown, not understanding it all, clapped and thumped with his stick, and was greatly pleased. But to hear Tilly's thin, wiry voice, Mr. Johnson's feeble tenor, and Harriet—who was always a note or two behind hand—was quite too much; they looked upon it as an amusing joke.

Mr. Johnson did not feel quite so comfortable as he hastily disappeared with Harriet, leaving Tilly to get down how she could. Lady Beldon and Percy Blythe exchanged a glance full of humour. Mrs. Frostick was heard audibly to call it

"howling," and the Rector stifled his feelings in a pocket-handkerchief. However, everyone was amused.

The lovely "Ballade" was received with great satisfaction, as indeed anything Lady Beldon chose to play would have been; they were satisfied to see her there.

Then came the star of the evening, "Mr. Adolphus Frampton." His songs were neither elegant nor classical. His "Champagne Charlie," with his intoxicated "make up," was received with round after round of cheers, the "gallery," as he quite anticipated, joining in the song and chorus. They had everything over twice, and his other songs—in fact, he was the hero of the evening.

And the hour was so late Adelaide Craster's second song had to be omitted, to Percy's regret.

However, the audience went away in

high good humour; after all, it was local talent.

"Well, Percy," said the rector with an amused smile; "it might have been worse."

"I think not, sir."

"At any rate, they are all pleased," said Lady Louisa, as she thought over the trio.

"Except Mrs. Frostick,". said Esmé Beldon, laughing.

"No, the Brown girls would never go down with her," said Lady Louisa.

CHAPTER XI.

It was a far more difficult affair to get the play under way. The Rectory was full of guests, and two or three were at Dr. Lewis's. In the course of the next fortnight, Lord Frampton and Sabina Maitland were to be married; so they wished to have the performance at the earliest possible date.

"Young Marlowe" was to be taken by Mr. Chetwynd, a friend of Charlie Vere's, and a great favourite; "Mr. Hardcastle," by Charlie himself; "Hastings," by Lord Frampton; and a Mr. Woodward was to take the two parts of "Diggory" and the "Landlord."

The pretty character of "Miss Hardcastle" was to be Pauline's, and Sabina was

the "Miss Hastings." Adelaide Craster was to be initiated for the first time as the "Maid" —a dashing widow, a Mrs. Bell, undertook "Mrs. Hardcastle." So that all the principal rôles were filled up, not forgetting *the* one of "Tony," by Adolphus Frampton. The rehearsals were very laborious, and a cause of much vexation to Lord Frampton. For "Tony," instead of pinching and teasing "Miss Hastings," persisted in kissing her! &c., and all of which Sabina was wicked enough to enjoy.

"Don't be disagreeable, Arthur! It will be all over in a week!"

Certainly playing in Private Theatricals had much improved Lord Frampton. He had lost that extremely listless, bored appearance; in fact, nobody could be very listless near Sabina, who was quick in everything. No one knew their part better than she; and she took care Lord

Frampton should know his! But he was far from happy, for Jack Chetwynd was a dangerously handsome fellow, and was greatly smitten with Sabina. So, between this gentleman and Adolphus Frampton—who was exceedingly "gone" on her—the stage manager, Charlie Vere, had much ado to keep the peace.

However, by constant repetition they became perfect—the stage was erected, and the best scenery under the circumstances obtained. Their pretty eighteenth-century costumes were again greatly admired. The Rector, who was admitted to the rehearsals, was delighted, Goldsmith being one of his greatest favourites.

So, at last, the night arrived for the "grand performance." It caused far more interest than the concert; and the hall was filled long before the time. There was a commodious room under the orchestra, and

this was the "green room"; here all the Dramatis Personæ assembled — Pauline, in her exquisite dress of embroidered silk and powdered hair, and Sabina in her Watteau sacque, with her lovely dark hair tied with ribbon, were perfectly charming! As the respective scenes came on, cheer after cheer rose. Lord Frampton waiting at the side to come on, saw Adolphus take Sabina by the waist and kiss her. He heard her whisper, "You must *pinch*, not kiss me, Adolphus!" in her coquettish voice; instead of which he kissed her again. There was a laugh among the audience, and from the back seats arose a cry of "encore! encore!"

Lord Frampton's face flushed a deep red, and then left it pale and stern.

Charlie Vere called out, "For goodness' sake don't play the fool now, Adolphus! You will ruin everything." But Adolphus

was far too excited to listen to reason—he *thoroughly* enjoyed his part. The consequence was, the audience were delighted with him, and applauded again and again.

Neither he nor Sabina noticed the angry burning gleam in Arthur Frampton's eyes. Miss Maitland, indeed, was as intoxicated with her success as Adolphus, and when she was not flirting with him, she was with Chetwynd.

Lord Frampton said never a word. He went through his part, and when the curtain at last came down, amidst deafening applause, he quickly donned his every day costume, and went off to the Rectory, where he was staying.

And an hour afterwards, when the entire party adjourned for supper and a small dance, a note was handed to Sabina.

She gaily opened it, but as she read it she turned very pale.

"I hope there is no bad news in it, Miss Maitland," said Jack Chetwynd, somewhat anxiously.

Oh, no! Lord Frampton was—He had to go to town. And she resumed her gay talk, her manner charming as ever, and her eyes were feverish with excitement.

Where was Lord Frampton?

Oh, he had been obliged to go to town—so sorry—he left a note to say so.

This was what the note really said—

"Sabina, from to-night, I set you free. You have passed all limits, even that my love could allow—henceforth, as far as I am concerned, you are your own mistress. Blame me as much as you think proper. I go abroad at once.

"FRAMPTON."

At last she realised what she had done, though no one at the Rectory could guess

from her high spirits anything untoward had happened. The only person who read it all, was Percy Blythe. He had seen Lord Frampton's indignation, he had seen Sabina read the note, and noted her wild gaiety, but his sympathy was with the outraged wounded heart of the young man, not with her.

The next day came a telegram from Colonel Luttrell.

"Come up at once, your father arrived."

Yes the mortifications were coming thick and fast on Sabina's wretched heart.

She hastened at once to her uncle Selwyn. "Andrews, let me see my uncle first, please, before you tell anyone I am here."

"The Colonel is in the study, and the 'judge' and my mistress in the drawing-room."

She flew into the study, and falling on

her knees, placed her head against her uncle's breast, and the tears ran down her face. "Oh, uncle ! uncle ! what shall I do ? Read this !" And as he read, there came a grave, almost stern look on his face.

"Sabina ! have you forgotten my warning ?—Did I not tell you, you would go too far ? Child, men's hearts are not to be trampled on by your wanton feet."

"Oh, dear Uncle Selwyn, do not you turn against me ! What shall I do ? What shall I do ?—and papa ?——"

"Your father has come over, at some inconvenience, to be present at your marriage. He would not tell you, for fear of disappointment. And now what can be said ? How spare the blow ? It will be terrible to him !"

"What will you tell him ?" she asked in agony.

"*The truth!* Give me that note. I had better see him first. Stay here, I will come for you."

This was punishment with a vengeance! And then came the thought of all the whispers, the scandal; the beautiful trousseau which her new maid was already arranging for packing, for they were to have sailed immediately after the marriage; the presents, costly and numerous, already in the inner drawing-room—possibly her father had seen them! Oh, it was terrible! And then the loss of Arthur's love! Now she saw it, in all its patient, loving endurance—her scant, and often uncourteous treatment, oh, how it all came home to her, stinging her like scorpions! All over! All over! Anything more desolate than Sabina Maitland in this hour, can hardly be conceived.

She stood there, her face pale with

anguish, her eyes simply touching in their pathetic misery.

The door opened, her father came in. At the sight of her suffering face, his own softened.

With one look at him, she flew into his arms.

"Papa! Papa! Oh, Papa!"

"Oh my wee bird! is it thus I find you? Forsaken, dishonoured in your name! I will hunt that scoundrel down till——"

"Hush, Papa!" said Sabina, gravely. "In *no way* must you blame Lord Frampton. Uncle Selwyn here will tell you how wicked I have been, and how patiently Arthur has behaved throughout everything."

"Wicked! No, Sabina! but terribly imprudent and foolish," said Colonel Luttrell.

"Can we do nothing?" said Judge Maitland.

"No, George!" said his brother-in-law, unhesitatingly. "Sabina has brought it upon herself, and she must bear the consequences. Is it not true, Sabina?"

"Yes, Uncle!" she answered sadly, "it is all true. I, and I alone, am to blame. Papa, darling, will you forgive me! I know Uncle Selwyn will his little pet."

"Ah, child, yes!" said her uncle with the tears in his eyes. "God knows I will! If you have erred through thoughtless vanity, you will have to suffer for it."

"Papa! can't we go back to India at once, before the people begin to talk about me?" And even as she spoke, a deep burning wave of colour rushed over her face and neck.

"We will. There is a ship sailing on Thursday. Could we get off by that, think you, Selwyn?"

"I fear not! All the berths will be taken, but I will see what can be done."

"Aunt Edith! can Watson pack some of my clothes? Papa finds we can go after all!"

"Yes, darling!" said Mrs. Luttrell, drawing the desolate girl to her, and tenderly kissing the pale cheek.

"Oh Auntie! how thankful I do feel Madame Celeste has not begun my wedding dress. I suppose I may as well take those that have come home, and some of my clothes. My presents must all go back."

"Leave them in my charge, Sabina, I will see to everything."

The French maid had been dismissed. "Mademoiselle was obliged suddenly to go to India; doubtless she would be married later on." These reports spread themselves about and saved some pain. Those old

friends who knew the state of affairs, said very little on the subject; the judge had unexpectedly arrived in England and had returned with his daughter, and, Lord Frampton being abroad, they concluded he had gone likewise.

And as Colonel and Mrs. Luttrell returned from seeing the Judge and his daughter on their way to India, Edith Luttrell, after a silent review of the situation, said: "Selwyn, I think you and I had better take a trip to Mentone or Homburg, or some Continental place; we shall thus escape many questionings; and you really need a change, dearest, for this has worried you sadly."

"It has, dear wife; only I am so thankful to know and feel I have a true and noble woman for my wife! May our poor little Sabina some day be as true!"

"She will, Selwyn, I feel convinced.

Gold must be tried in the fire, and no character can be completed until it has suffered. It may be this trial will be the beginning of nobler things for the dear child."

"Amen!" said the Colonel.

Colonel and Mrs. Luttrell went abroad, and, as no one knew the exact state of affairs, everyone surmised different things. Most of them agreed "Miss Maitland had been obliged to postpone her marriage on account of the illness of a member of her family in India, for her father had come home for her, and taken her back with him." And, as some new thing turned up just then, they and their affairs were forgotten in some one else's scandals and troubles, and the world wagged on.

No one was more indignant than Earl

Vanseur, he had rather repudiated the whole affair; he had hoped great things for his son, and lo, this was the result! But unfortunately he could not give vent to his anger, because Lord Frampton had expressly desired it should not be discussed in any way; it was an affair that concerned no one but himself, and Miss Maitland.

Many months had passed, summer was at hand. "Leafy June," in all her fresh fair graces, was with them. Lord Frampton had returned from his wanderings, and the craving to see Sabina Maitland was so strong he could not resist it. So he made an excuse to call on Colonel Luttrell. He was shown into the Colonel's study. Selwyn Luttrell was more than surprised to see him. "I thought you were in Russia, Frampton?"

"I have been there for months. I believe

I am qualified to write a history of the country, but I felt I *must* come back. Oh! Colonel Luttrell, I hardly know what you will think of me, when I tell you my love is stronger than my pride. Can you let me have one word with Miss Maitland?"

"My dear fellow—impossible!"

"Impossible?" said Lord Frampton, his thin, worn face full of pain.

"She has been in India for months."

"In India?" said the other blankly.

"Yes. Strangely enough, the very day you and she quarrelled, her father, Judge Maitland, arrived from India. He came over *expressly* for the marriage. You must know, Sabina has always been the spoilt darling of her family, and her parents could hardly bear the thought of her being married without one of them being present. So the judge thought it would be a pleasant surprise. It was a surprise to us all,

but not a pleasant one to him. So he took his daughter back by the very first vessel going to India."

Lord Frampton sat the picture of despair; his head between his hands.

"Did he blame me very severely?"

"Well, honestly, he did. He felt it most keenly."

"And she?"

"She vindicated you most nobly. She told her father how patiently you had borne all."

The tears forced themselves into the young man's eyes.

"Oh, Colonel Luttrell! I seem to be a very blackguard in my own eyes. Of course anyone so lovely as Sabina must be admired."

"Frampton, my dear fellow, I do not blame you. Perhaps it would have been wise not to have sent forth such an ulti-

matum as that note. You see it left no loop-hole for anything. Sabina *was* to blame, and she was honest enough to own it. As it is now, she is invaluable to her mother, who is in most delicate health. Indeed I should not be surprised if the judge retires and comes over to England."

"And you think I must wait?"

"Yes. Wait and have patience."

"You will say a good word for me?"

"Yes," said the Colonel with a laugh.

"Do!" said the young man, rising and grasping the other's hands fervently. "Tell her I love her, ask her to forgive my brutal note, say I will wait for years if she will only take me at last."

"Leave it to me. And now come and see Mrs. Luttrell. Some dear friends of ours and yours are with her, the Veres."

So Lord Frampton, somewhat consoled, went up to the drawing-room; and it was a

painful pleasure to see his cousin Pauline again, it brought back Sabina. However, they were all so good and kind to him.

"Frampton! Do you know I have a very small daughter?" said Pauline.

"Indeed I did not. But I am sure I am glad to hear of it."

"She is looking out for a godfather. Will you undertake that dignity?"

"That I will. But on one condition."

"What is it?"

"That you will let me have something to say to her name."

"I should like to know what you suggest first, before I agree. You might consider 'Betsy Jane' a suitable name for my daughter!"

"Pauline!"

"Well, what do you propose?"

"Sabina Pauline."

"Oh! Well, I don't object."

"And Charlie?"

"Charlie will be quite satisfied. So I shall have it thus—'Sabina Pauline Charlotte.'"

"Why not give it half-a-dozen while you are about it? Will cost no more!" said Mr. Vere.

"No, Charlie. It will just be as I have said—'Sabina Pauline Charlotte.'"

"And what does Aunt Laura say?"

"Mother is too delighted. She was so afraid she would have no grandchildren, that it does not matter what it is called provided it's a baby."

"Pauline, dear, I am very glad for your sake. I hope my little god-daughter may bring you every comfort and happiness."

"Thank you, Arthur, dear. Yours will come in time, never fear."

The change in Lord Frampton was marked. All the listless airs, all the affected

boredom, had vanished. He looked terribly in earnest. Having loved Sabina Maitland deeply, he had suffered much. He blamed himself incessantly, but it was a consolation to feel her uncle did not look upon him harshly. In point of fact, he did not know what a true friend he had in Colonel Luttrell, for if he had seen the letter that had been sent off that day, he would have rejoiced beyond measure. Selwyn pleaded his cause eloquently to the judge; he also wrote a very suggestive little epistle to Sabina. And having laid the seed, he left it to mature in the hearts of those he loved, thousands of miles away.

CHAPTER XII.

Sir Ernest Beldon slowly recovered his strength, but it was months before he looked anything like the hale, hearty young man who had started with so light a heart on that memorable journey. It had grieved him beyond measure that no trace could be found of the young woman who, at the risk of her own life, had saved his. To have the large fortune of his uncle, and to feel that that poor girl, who picked him up out of the deep waters that night, should have nothing, and might, perhaps, be wanting the very necessaries of life! In vain he sent to the solicitors in Sydney to spare no expense to trace her. But it was always in vain. She seemed to have disappeared. It preyed upon him, and it grieved his wife,

who had hardly recovered the birth of her little girl—now three months old.

"Ernest, why should we not take a tour? Let us *all* go out again—you, I, and the children. I think a sea voyage would set me up."

"Are you sure, Esmé, it would not be too much for you, or the little ones?"

"I should *love* it, Ernest. We might get Percy and Hortense to come here and look after things. Let us go, dear. We *ought* to try and see what has become of your uncle's daughter, for she saved your life, and mine. For if you had died, I think I should have longed for death. Could we afford a yacht of our own? We should not be tied in any way. We must live somewhere. Why not in this way? Others have done it before us."

The idea pleased Sir Ernest, and it gave him much interest in arranging and

planning. To see her husband strong and well, Esmé would have sacrificed everything. He was all the dearer because he had been so near death, and she felt a deep debt of gratitude to the woman who had saved him.

A yacht was found, whose owner was very willing to dispose of her, and with all due care a very comfortable home was arranged on board. There was no lack of means and no lack of comfort; and one August day they all set sail—a regular colony of friends to see them off. And as the white sails of "The Lark" were unfurled, a hearty "God speed" and "Good-bye" floated after them.

"After all, Ernest, it is worth while leaving, if only to come back again! I only wish Hester and Gerald could have come out with us."

"I do not think it would be their idea of

happiness," said Sir Ernest, with a smile. "Gerald feels with their great wealth they have equal responsibilities, and those are at home."

Both Sir Gerald and his wife were full of business. Not only in the management of his estate, but in large undertakings on behalf of their poorer brethren.

The old Manor had been repaired, and the ravages caused by the fire had been partially hidden by creepers and ivy, planted as soon as the new masonry had been completed.

Hester's son, a sturdy little fellow of two years, still reigned supreme over Percival, who looked upon him as a young king. The old servant devoted himself entirely to the young autocrat, who had no more willing slave.

"You will spoil him, Percival!"

"No, no, Sir, begging your pardon. I

have had some experience with children, but I have never seen a more noble child than Master Horace."

"Is it not rather early times to judge of his 'nobility'?" said Sir Gerald, with a laugh, "considering you humour him in everything."

"He's a true Lanyon, Sir!" was all the old man would say, and Gerald did not interfere, for the child was the apple of the old man's eye.

Gerald's love was greatly centred on his little year-old daughter, whose small form was often seen in her father's arms as they took their walks in the broad grounds. As for Hester! her heart was aglow with happiness! Not only did she love her husband with a deep devotion, and her two young children; but it caused a happy anxiety, that others should benefit by it, and her schemes of benevolence were multifarious.

CHAPTER XIII.

PERCY BLYTHE was sitting in the Rectory study, full of business and parochial affairs. The Rector, whose health now was far from strong, was with Lady Louisa at Torquay, where they would remain for six weeks. Mr. Blythe was perfectly capable of doing all that was required of him, and the parishioners were equally willing that their Rector, whom they loved very much, should take every care of his health.

Percy was very busy, for everything devolved upon him. Mr. Johnson was willing to do anything, but his capacities were limited. He was exceedingly good-natured and obliging. But, as the Rector put it, he *was* dense.

The page-boy brought in a telegram.

"Is there any answer, sir?"

"Wait till I see."

"Come up at once.—*Adolphus*."

The telegram was from Charlie Vere.

"Give this answer in—'Will come.'"

"Anything more, sir?"

"Nothing more."

"Master Adolphus has got into a mess, I know," and he hastened every preparation, left a note for Mr. Johnson, and set off by the first up train.

Adolphus Frampton had been seeing London life, and not the best part of it. He had a fairly good allowance from his father, and was supposed to be studying for the Bar, but besides studying for the Bar he was practising other accomplishments. When Percy Blythe reached Mr. Vere's house he saw Pauline.

"Oh, Mr. Blythe! You must go off at

once to the police-court! I am afraid Adolphus has got into trouble. Charlie is there—look, this is the message he left!"

Percy read it hastily. "I will go now, Mrs. Vere, I have my cab at the door!" When he did reach the court, he found Charlie Vere.

"I fear Adolphus is in a devil of a mess! It's about some gambling fracas."

"I hope it will not be in the police reports, it would break his father's heart," said Mr. Blythe gravely.

They had to wait about while the first cases were taken. Then Adolphus Frampton's came on—and he likewise! Anything more deplorable can hardly be imagined. His coat was slit down the back and exposed its lining, his shirt front was crushed and dishevelled, his face soiled and bruised, his hair all over his face, and no hat.

The magistrate asked him sternly what he had to say for himself.

He said he had been introduced to a club by some friends, and he caught some man he was playing with cheating. He told him so. The man called him names; he struck him; the police came in; the others escaped; the lights were blown out; and he was taken to the police station, where he had been all night. It was his first visit to the place.

The magistrate asked the inspector if it were so?

Yes; the owner of the gambling den had disappeared; he was a Count Marcovitch. The club bore a bad name. There was no money found, only the cards, and some were marked.

Had the prisoner lost any money?

Yes; twenty pounds!

The magistrate, under the circumstances,

thought the prisoner had been punished enough for his imprudence; he would only inflict a fine, and advised him for the future to keep clear of gambling hells.

So Mr. Adolphus Frampton was handed over to the custody of his two friends in court. Charlie took off his own great-coat for him to put on, and Percy went out and bought him a hat, and they conveyed the unhappy youth to South Kensington.

"Well, Adolphus, you have been and gone and done it this time! What do you suppose your father will feel when he sees it all in to-morrow's police intelligence?"

"Oh! Blythe, I am sure I don't know," said the young man, with all the bounce gone out of him. "And I'm simply starving! I haven't had a taste of food since I dined with Jack Chetwynd at 'The Criterion,' and it must be nearly one o'clock."

"Yes, it's about that," said Mr. Vere.

"How came you to go to such a place?" asked Percy.

"There was a fellow dining with us, and he said, 'Let us go and have a quiet game of cards. I know a nice little place.' First of all I won a lot. Then some chap with a foreign name began playing; he soon cleared me out. Then I found he was doing a little business like the 'heathen Chinee.' I told him so straight out. He called me a few names, so I just hit out from the shoulder. Then they all began to fight, and we had a regular scrimmage. Then they cried out the 'police' were at the door! They blew out the lights. I heard somebody clearing off the cash. When the police lighted a candle, there was nobody left but *me!* The others had all clean bolted. How or where they got to, beats me! Of course they nabbed me; and you

saw the object I was! I *looked* guilty of everything! Any way, I suffered for the lot."

"All I hope is, Adolphus, you won't try this on again."

"*Catch* me, that's all! But I would not care so much if it were not for the dear old dad! Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"Perhaps it won't be in the papers," said Mr. Vere, consolingly.

"I thought they put everything in?"

"Sometimes they don't."

When they arrived at Charlie's house, they could do nothing with Adolphus until he had had something to eat; he would neither wash himself nor change his coat.

"Oh! cousin Pauline, if you only knew what it is to be starving! I hadn't even a penny. See!" and he turned inside out his empty pockets. "I couldn't raise even enough for a roll."

"Poor Adolphus! Never mind, dear; eat as much as you can," said Pauline, with all the weak amiability of her sex to forgive the culprit.

"Adolphus, I think you had better go back with me—by the five o'clock train. Perhaps Mr. Vere can lend you some clothes."

"Certainly I will," said that gentleman.

"I'll go, if only just to make up for it all. But there's just one consolation I have got."

"What is it?" asked the gentlemen.

"I have just spoiled that chap's beauty. I should like to see his eyes this morning."

"I think it just as well, Adolphus, for you to be safely out of it all—and—decently attired, for I have *never* seen such an object as you look now."

"No! I don't suppose any 'old clo' would give much for my wardrobe as it

stands. Don't be down on a fellow, Blythe, you don't know what it is to be in a police station all night."

"I am *thankful* to say I do not, and I hope this is your first and last experience."

"By Jove! yes. Now, if you will excuse me, Pauline, I will go and adorn myself with Charlie's clothes."

"Do, dear," said Pauline, with a laugh, as she surveyed her cousin, now, in much better spirits after his lunch, for the poor wretch was frightfully hungry.

It was no use blaming him, for after all he was more sinned against than sinning. He was young and boyish, and, if only it could be kept from his parents' ears, both Percy and Charlie felt the lesson would not be wasted. So by the five-o'clock train he departed safely in Percy's care, and was comfortably installed at the

Rectory, from whence he wrote the most dutiful letters to his mother, that she, unknown to the Rector, sent him a ten-pound note.

Nothing could have been more opportune, for his finances were simply "nil," so he paid back the small sum Percy had lent him with great gladness.

"Isn't the mater an old trump?"

"Don't vex her heart, Adolphus! It would be cruel to repay such love as hers with bad deeds."

"All right, old fellow! I really do mean to turn over a new leaf."

"Do! There's an evening party at the Crasters', I can't go, or, if I do, it will be very late, but you might; they would be very pleased to have you."

"Happy thought! So I will."

So Adolphus went and enjoyed himself, and Percy just looked in for half an hour.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mr. Dashwood was busy in his study, but not too busy to watch, with affectionate eyes, his wife, as she stood in the garden with their only child in her arms. Peggy looked as sweet and homely as ever, though she had on a deplorable old hat. She put down the little girl, while she stooped to pull up some vagrant weeds.

"Esmé, go and fetch mother's gloves."

And the tiny scrap went in soberly to the hall and brought them back in her chubby hands, and her mother set to vigorously to uproot all the intruders on her cherished borders.

And Cyril watched all, with heart-felt pleasure and pride. How he loved that little daughter of his! How her baby

prattle went to his heart! And when he mused over his life—to think that *he*, of all men, should settle down in a dull country vicarage, and *like* it! Yes, that was the strange thing—like it! He felt he would not exchange it for anything; nay, can he not say:

> "O, grant me, Heaven, a middle state,
> Neither too humble nor too great,
> More than enough for Nature's ends,
> With something left to treat my friends."

At last the villagers had learned to love him. At first they took him on trust, on Miss Peggy's recommendation, now they liked him for himself. And it is a constant thing for him in the summer evenings to be busy in the garden, unconsciously carrying out the old vicar's ideas, with Peggy as his constant helpmate, so that the old garden looks lovely, and flourishes continually. The two little sisters are at school in

Leeds, but they spend their holidays at their old home, while Jack has joined his brother and sister in Australia.

Polly seems invaluable to Mrs. Fraser, whose health gets worse; but when she is able she drives over with Polly to the Vicarage. Then the two sisters are truly happy, and the wonderful little child, Esmé Dashwood, who talks so distinctly and so prettily, and who is such a quaint, old fashioned little thing, that she seems to have come from a bye-gone century.

Lady Beldon, with Sir Ernest, came expressly for her christening, and the villagers were much impressed by the grand doings, and the honour done to Miss Peggy. They always spoke of the tiny child as "the little lady," and she was surrounded by a halo of love. As for Christie and Mousie, their pride at being aunts to such a wonderful child made them

full of great importance, especially among their schoolfellows.

There came wonderful presents from far-off lands, for "Baby Dashwood," from her god-parents, Sir Ernest and Lady Beldon; so that Peggy considers by the time her daughter grows up she will have a fortune.

The church had been almost completely restored, and there had been built in the High Street a beautiful new school-room, a thank-offering from Hester Lanyon and Esmé Beldon. The old school-mistress was pensioned off, and a new one, young and bright, reigned in her stead. The village was cheerful and happy; Parson and Miss Peggy, and "the little lady," were dearly loved, they were the centre around which everything moved.

Cyril no longer begrudged the flowers on the grave of the old vicar. Did not his baby daughter add her little tribute every

Sunday? Yes; he liked to think now, that, when his time came, they would do the same to his last resting place.

It was by gradual and severe inspection of himself, that Cyril Dashwood had at last arrived at the conviction that he had received far more than he deserved, in the way of happiness. He was thankful that his atonement had reinstated him in the good opinion of two women, so worthy, as Lady Lanyon and Lady Beldon. As he looked back, he felt how much he had outraged both their dignity, and love; but there was a deep pleasure in feeling and knowing that they had both thoroughly forgiven him, and now looked upon him as a valued friend.

As for his wife, her belief in him was sublime. There could be no such other man as her Cyril, so noble, so chivalrous. He had not considered it necessary to

inform his good innocent wife of his early shortcomings, there was no need. She had put him on a pedestal, and if he can remain there, why not?—he means to try.

The little sisters-in-law are at school at his expense, and so their brother has been enabled to go to the Colonies, and try, with the others, to make a home for them, while Polly is invaluable at the Hall, and is also a comfort to his wife. So we may safely leave one of the three Curates, whose fortunes we have chronicled and whose,

"Frrors, like straws, upon the surface flow.
He who would search for pearls must dive below."

CHAPTER XV.

THERE were rumours in Langton, that "Combe Towers" was once more to be thrown open. It had been closed for some three or four years. Not that Gerald or Lady Lanyon were coming back to the latter's old home. But still, there were signs of coming life. The windows were thrown open, and paperhangers, and whitewashers, and tradespeople from London, took the place in hand. Then Colonel and Mrs. Luttrell came and visited, and arranged, planned and ordered. During this time they stayed at the Red House, though Dr. and Mrs. Lewis were still in foreign lands. But "Combe Towers" was not required for them; no, that was very certain.

By and-bye, Mrs. Luttrell hired servants, and additional furniture arrived, and was as busy as a Bee getting things in order. But for whom? Mrs. Frostick considered Mrs. Luttrell was trifling with the Town. Why could she not say who was expected? But Mrs Luttrell only went on with her preparations. The Colonel took in hand the grounds, and they were got into fairly decent order, but certainly not as they were in the time of Miss Higgins; but it was the end of May, so, with bedding-out plants, it was made to look very bright and cheerful, and shrubs were trimmed up, and walks weeded, so in the first week of June the place looked very comfortable and home-like. Then arrived a van load of very curious things from India—black carved chairs, davenports, carpets, Indian goods, queer carved things, mats, rugs. Such a collection as was

transferred from the Railway to the van, had actually never been seen before. After these had arrived and been settled in their various places in "Combe Towers," Colonel and Mrs. Luttrell went —the one to Town, and the other to the "Towers."

A day or two afterwards, Mrs. Luttrell, in Dr. Lewis's old large carriage, and a fly following, went up to the station, to meet the down train from London; it was about six o'clock, and the Langton world was on the tiptoe of expectation, some at the station, some at their windows. When the train arrived, there was the Colonel, and an elderly, imposing-looking gentleman, a pale, delicate lady, who was lifted out with great tenderness. Then a young lady stepped out. Surely! Yes! it was Miss Maitland! Then an elderly-looking maid, and lastly a gorgeously dressed black

servant, in a turban, who seemed to hold the elderly gentleman in great respect.

They all kissed and hugged Mrs. Luttrell. George! Ellen! Edith! Sabina!—these names, in all their warm affection, were heard and commented upon by the interested bystanders, Mrs. Frostick among them.

Then Mrs. Maitland, Mrs. Luttrell and Sabina, got into the large carriage, with the maid outside, while the fly held the Judge, Colonel Luttrell, the luggage and the Indian servant. So the procession moved on, till it reached Combe Towers, where Mrs. Maitland was installed in Hester's old morning room, made beautiful for her by the clever, loving hands of her sister-in-law. Sabina was charmed with everything, and the Judge warmly thanked the Colonel.

"It is just what I have been dreaming of

for years, Selwyn ! How fresh and green it looks, Ellen, doesn't it ? "

" What a sweet old place ! "

" It *is* delicious ! How good of you, dearest Selwyn and Edith, and how prettily you have arranged all my possessions ! "

" Is it anything like what I described, mother ? " asked Sabina, as she deftly attended to her invalid mother.

" Yes, love ! only prettier ! You did not tell me of those copper beeches, or the cedar. But I know, I shall love it."

" By-and by, when you can get out in your wheeled chair, you will be so charmed with the grounds, won't she, Aunt Edith ? "

" I fancy she will, Sabina. Also there is some one else, who will be equally charmed to hear of *your* return. Can you guess, love ? " said her aunt, kissing her, and whispering in her ear.

A rosy flush spread over Sabina's face.

So apparently she did guess, but she said nothing, only, with the help of the maid, assisted her mother into her bed-room, which had been arranged on the same floor.

Later on, the party, with the exception of Mrs. Maitland, adjourned for dinner, and afterwards the two gentlemen made the tour of the whole place, while Mrs. Luttrell and Sabina, linked arm-in-arm, walked through the pleasant shady shrubberies.

Yes; it was exactly two years since that memorable day when Sabina had been summoned up to town by her uncle to meet her father. How well she remembered it! And as they drove past the town hall—the scene of her crowning folly—how it all came back to her! And the bitter mortification and misery she had suffered!

Mrs. Luttrell carefully studied her, and

she came to the conclusion that it was a very improved edition of Sabina that had returned—not Sabina the selfish, the egotistical, but a tender daughter, a charming companion, whom both parents loved to look upon, cheering them by her unselfish devotion.

Great faith had been attached to the home-coming of Mrs. Maitland, and both the Judge and his daughter anxiously looked forward to good results. So far, she had borne the journey better than could have been expected. The voyage had greatly improved her, and, with the more invigorating English climate, they allowed themselves to be cheered into hope.

"Lady Louisa and the Rector are expected home very soon, so Percy Blythe tells me. I shall be so glad for your mother's sake. Dear Lady Louisa is a host

in herself. She is such a sweet, cheerful creature. And it will be nice for the Rector to meet your father."

"And Adolphus?" said Sabina, with a little laugh.

"Oh, Adolphus really is settling down and studying, at last. He is in London now. He certainly owes everything to good Percy Blythe."

"And Mrs. Frostick?"

"Oh, *she* is alive, you may be sure, and devoured with curiosity. And now, dear, have you no questions to ask of a certain person?"

"Oh, Auntie, I am almost afraid! But you did say he would be pleased to hear I have come home."

"Yes, dear. He gave me this message to give you."

"Yes, Aunt Edith."

"'Tell her I shall always remain faithful

to her; that if she can ever bring herself to love me again, I am her faithful lover and slave.'"

"He is very noble, Auntie."

"I think he is, Sabina. He was so much improved. His travels have bronzed him; he looked so much more manly, too. And, my dear, the way he is run after! The mothers with marriageable daughters do not mean to let him escape for want of looking up. But, so far, he has proved impervious to their blandishments."

"All the same, Aunt Edith," said Sabina, after some silence, "I could not leave mother for any one; she clings to me. You see, the others have married, and we quite thought she would die out there. Papa says all the unfortunate affair, some two years ago, was almost Providential, on account of my being with her. So out

of my own misery some one has gained by it."

"And no one more than Sabina," thought her aunt, as she looked at the sweet face beside her.

"Now, Auntie! I must go to mother; she always likes me to read to her about this time, and Collins will want to be unpacking. I *am* so glad you are going to stay at the Red House, till Doctor and Mrs. Lewis come home. There come dear Uncle Selwyn and Papa! Well, Papa! and what do you think of it all? Does it please you?"

"That it does, love! I am charmed with it, and the way Selwyn and Edith have arranged it all! It will give me something to do to get all those hot-houses into working order."

"And you must have a horse, love, and we must get something very nice for the

mother to drive out in. Oh, I think we shall be wonderfully happy here."

"You delight me, George," said the Colonel.

"Now, Papa! I am going in to mother for a time, so *au revoir*." And the graceful figure ran off to the house with quick footsteps, and kissed her hand gaily as she disappeared. They all looked after her.

"Ah, no one knows what Sabina has been to us this last two years," said her father fondly. "I believe she really has kept her mother alive by her devotion."

"I think I never saw any one so vastly improved, there is something so sweet about her eyes," said her Uncle Selwyn. "She always was the daintiest little creature imaginable, but now there seems a tenderness about her I did not notice before."

No, it was a tenderness born of her own suffering. For Sabina had suffered acutely; it was months and months before

that letter written by her Uncle Selwyn arrived, to be like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. After having been in intimate communion day by day for over a year, to have been the daily recipient of the kindest love, the most unselfish devotion, and then suddenly to be cut off from everything by one blow, and by her own act! At first Sabina felt as if she could not bear it, but the alarming condition of her mother put every other thought aside, though the pain and the wound were there always.

And now she was in the same country, breathed the same air, heard of his fidelity, his message of love. Ah! it was worth the pain, to have the joy it gave her.

She entered her mother's chamber with a bright happy light in her eye, and drew a chair by her couch.

"Well, dearest! are you glad to get back

to England? You look so bright, I think you must be."

"Indeed, yes, mother; you know I have stayed in this neighbourhood so much with Aunt Edith, that I know nearly every one, this house as well, when Lady Lanyon was Miss Higgins, so it seems like coming home. You will like Lady Lousia! she is the dearest old thing you can possibly imagine, and the Rector *is* nice. Papa will like him, and Percy Blythe too."

"Who is Percy Blythe, love?"

"Oh, the Rector's dear friend and curate. Oh, mother, I am longing to introduce all the dear friends who were so good and kind to me when I was here. But, dearie, to give me that pleasure you must get strong. And now I will read you to sleep, and to morrow, if you feel equal to it, you shall make the grand tour in your wheeled chair." And then she softly read,

until her mother's tired eyes were closed, and the maid came in and quietly relieved the young lady, who joined the others in the drawing-room.

A month or two passed, and Mrs. Maitland had improved wonderfully. Lady Louisa had returned and brought her bright, cheering presence to bear on the invalid; she was very soon as invaluable to the sick woman as she had been to her friends of old.

Lady Louisa was one of those happy beings who diffuse cheerfulness around them as a matter of course. She would take Mrs. Maitland for drives, interest her in almost everything that was going on, so that not only was her bodily health improving, but her mind was interested, while the Judge and his daughter would ride with the Colonel and make acquaintance with every hill and dale.

One morning a little note came for Sabina from her aunt, Mrs. Luttrell:

"If your mother can spare you, come over and spend the day with me.

"E. L."

"Can you spare me, mother?"

"Of course, darling! Is not Lady Louisa coming for one thing? and if she were not, I am so well I could do with my own company, for once in a way."

"Very well, darling. I see Aunt Edith has sent her pony carriage, so I will just run and put my things on."

And Sabina equipped herself briskly, and rather looked forward to the day to be spent in Aunt Edith's society. There was always one theme which never tired Sabina, and as she drove along this theme was uppermost. She walked straight into her aunt's drawing-room.

"The mistress will be down in a few minutes, Miss Maitland."

"Thanks," and Sabina walked towards the window, that looked so pleasantly out on to the old garden.

As she stood there the door opened.

"Auntie, dear!" But instead of her aunt there came forward a face and a form that made her heart leap into her mouth.

"Arthur! Lord Frampton!"

"Sabina, at last!" And he came forth with two eager outstretched hands, and somehow her own were grasped warmly and held fast.

"Sabina, Sabina! have you forgiven me?"

"Forgiven you? It is I who need the forgiveness. I cannot forgive myself."

"Sabina, have you still any love left for me?"

But Sabina answered nothing, only a blush went over her face.

"Won't you relieve my suspense?"

"What can I say?"

"Say! Say, 'I love you and forgive you, Arthur.'"

"Well, Arthur, I do love you, but I have nothing, as I told you, to forgive."

He clasped her eagerly in his arms, he required nothing more. His Sabina, his wild little love of old days, was his own once more; and when dear, kind Aunt Edith, with a little warning noise, came in later on, she found traces of tears on her niece's face.

"Oh Auntie, I am so happy at last!"

"So am I, Aunt Edith, said Lord Frampton in tones of convincing quality. "We have made it all up, and I feel so happy I should like to kiss you."

"Perhaps the Colonel might object to

that," said Mrs. Luttrell with a hearty laugh. "He is exceedingly particular who I embrace."

It is needless to say that these two young people spent a truly happy day. The Colonel was safe in London. They wandered about the old gardens of the Red House under the old trees just as Esmé Curtis and Cyril Dashwood, in the days gone by, had done. How many vows have the trees heard in their time? Who knows? But the babblings of these two were very happy.

"Sabina, I shall call on your father!"

"Arthur, you won't want me to leave mother yet? Her health is so delicate. When she gets strong—by-and-bye."

"Sabina, I love you too much to be selfish. I will, if needs be, wait for you as Jacob waited for Rachel! So long as you are mine, I fear nothing."

"You will have no cause, Arthur," said Sabina earnestly. "You are, and you will be, the only man I shall ever love. Suffering has taught me to know myself at last."

Mrs. Luttrell's page-boy drove Sabina back. Lord Frampton would dearly have liked to do so himself; but Mrs. Luttrell was stern in this:

"No, no, Frampton, be satisfied and be reasonable. You have yet to obtain the Judge's consent, and you had better leave it in the Colonel's hands."

"Mrs. Luttrell, I will obey you implicitly."

"Oh, Auntie! how *good* you are. It was sweet of you," whispered Sabina, as they parted.

"Good-bye, child! and be off with you," said her aunt; but there were

furtive tears in Mrs. Luttrell's eyes, only, fortunately, it was dusk and no one could see.

"How good you have been to us, Mrs. Luttrell," said Lord Frampton, when Sabina had departed.

"Dear Frampton, I waited to prove my love, till the man I loved was nigh unto death, and even now he suffers at times. I do not wish you and Sabina to go through the same bitter experience." And she told him of the life-long love of the Colonel for herself.

"Sabina's character has been tried and not found wanting. She had been spoilt, she was heedless, volatile. Now, she has proved herself a devoted daughter, and the hearts of her parents safely trust in her, and so may her husband. I think you must wait a little longer. Even I could not advise her to leave her mother;

though she is rapidly improving, you must give her time."

"I will only say to you as I said to her, I will wait seven years for her; she is worth it."

"Yes; I think she is. Hark! here comes the Colonel." And Mrs. Luttrell rushed off to the entrance to meet her husband, and hug him as heartily as if he had been away weeks, instead of a day!

"Is Frampton here, Edith?"

"Very much so. Here he comes to answer for himself."

"Here I am, Colonel, as happy as a lark."

"Mischief, Edith, mischief!" said her husband.

"My dear Selwyn, you speak in enigmas."

"Yes; but you understand. However,

dinner first, and then you shall tell me all."

After the dinner was over and the cigarettes and coffee were being enjoyed, Colonel Luttrell was put in possession of the whole affair.

"I expect I shall have some trouble with the Judge; he thinks it is a thing of the past—is forgotten, in fact. He does not want to part with Sabina."

"Oh, Colonel Luttrell! tell him I will wait, I will try and be as patient as possible; and if I *do* marry soon, Sabina shall stay with them as long as he likes. Say anything, so long as *he* only says yes."

"Well, well! I will see what I can do, but match-making isn't at all in my line."

"Not match-making, Colonel, but heart-making!"

"I knew Edith here would get me into a mess, she has no conscience."

But his wife laughed happily. "Now Frampton, go to bed, and remember 'faint heart never won fair lady.' Take a lesson from the Colonel! He made me marry him, he did indeed!" And with a saucy little grimace at her husband, she wished them both good night.

"Ah!" said he, gazing after her, "If your Sabina only comes up to my Edith, you will be a lucky man."

"I am sure of it."

"Frampton, I am not sure if this long separation and trouble has not been a good thing for you both."

"I can hardly agree with you, Colonel."

"Yes," said the other, with conviction; "it has proved you both. Sabina has had time to be sure of her own heart, and you will not love her the less because you have waited for her."

"I have always loved her."

"I believe you have, and now you know for a certainty she loves you."

The Judge on the whole took it better than the Colonel anticipated. He dearly loved his child, but still, if they would wait for a time, he would give his consent. This they most joyfully agreed to, and when Lord Frampton came over the Judge was pleased with him, and Mrs. Maitland was charmed, so, thanks to Colonel Luttrell, the wheels moved very easily, and he was very soon as much at home as if they had known him for years.

The settlements he proposed to make were very handsome, and Judge Maitland could not but feel gratified. Lord Vanseur, the father, was polite, and that was all they required of him at present.

CHAPTER XVI.

Mrs. Frostick had never left her home, if a very little excursion out of the town to a neighbouring village might be looked upon as home-land. But now, in a most unexpected manner, she had been summoned to London on some legal business connected with a small legacy left to her by a distant cousin, and it was with great fear and trembling she set off to the mighty Babylon. She thought she might have to stay three weeks; and Betsy was left with more admonitions than her old head could ever hold—was cautioned and cautioned—and at last the omnibus came to fetch Mrs. Frostick and her luggage, and she went off by the train, whose advent often gave her such topics of interest.

But now occurred a strange event, at which even old David Brown himself connived. Immediately after Mrs. Frostick's departure, the banns of James Johnson and Harriet Hannah Brown were given out, to the great surprise of everyone (except Mr. Blythe).

The Rector laughed outright when Percy told him before the service.

"Old Brown's brimming over with pride, and directly 'the three times of asking' is over, they are to be married at once; so we shall want help for a week, because, Rector, you must give Johnson a little holiday."

"Oh, yes, let him have his little holiday. And where are they going to live?"

"With Mr. Brown. Johnson does nearly live there now."

"What do Johnson's people say to it all?"

"I have not the faintest idea," answered Percy. "Harriet Brown has a little money of her own, which her father has settled upon her."

The first, second and third Sunday were over, and on the Monday morning the bridal procession wended its way to church, 'Tilly feeling somewhat improved in social status, Harriet really looking well in her white silk dress. There were a few friends present; kind Lady Louisa was there, and Mrs. Luttrell greatly gratified old Brown by being present likewise.

"How is it Mrs. Frostick is not here?" asked she of Mr. Brown.

"Hush, ma'am, if you please!" as if he was fearful her very name would bring her back. "It's just this! My lassies have stolen a march upon her! We was only waiting for her absence for this little affair to come off. They've been courting

this year and more; and now, when she comes home, they will be *married!*" The old chap chuckled and crowed over this with great glee.

"The fact is, ma'am, she *has* a tongue!"

"She *has*, Mr. Brown!"

And now the Rector began the service, and Adolphus actually was "best man" for the occasion; but he had volunteered on condition that he was not expected to kiss the bridesmaid in the person of 'Tilly or Mr. Johnson's sister, who was, if anything, a thinner and more nervous edition of her brother.

The newly-married couple duly started for their short honeymoon.

And Betty bemoaned the fact that she could neither read or write. What *would* the *Mistress* say when she came home! It *was* surprising, to be sure!

And before Mrs. Frostick had returned,

the bride and bridegroom had settled themselves under David Brown's roof; he had given them up entirely one portion of the house, and Mr. Johnson had moved in his modest possessions. Both the sisters were very good friends, and the arrangement suited them all.

If Mr. Johnson was dense and nervous, he was quite able to appreciate the advantages of having to pay no rent, and the run of a by-no-means-to-be-despised home. His own family were equally satisfied. So there was no reason why they should not get on very comfortably.

A week or ten days had passed, and Mrs. Frostick was seen to get into the omnibus waiting at the Station.

Presently, Keziah, who was "going up town," got in likewise.

"I hope I sees you well, Mum, after your great journey."

"Yes, I am well enough. How's Betty?"

"Well enough, M'am. Have you heard of the grand doings at Mr. Brown's, M'am?"

"Grand doings? What grand doings? Have they had a fire?"

"A fire! Lawks, M'am, no! It's a wedding they've had."

"A what?" shrieked Mrs. Frostick, as the omnibus began to move.

"A wedding!" bawled out old Keziah.

"Has old David gone and made a fool of himself? I'm not surprised!"

"No, M'am," screamed out Keziah, louder than ever; "it's Miss Harriet's got married to Parson Johnson!"

Mrs. Frostick heard this time, and anything more maliciously angry than her face could hardly be imagined. She realised they had taken advantage of her absence to enjoy themselves!

Keziah was for giving her full particulars, she snapped her up with:

"Hold your tongue, I don't want to hear any more of such trash!"

Keziah felt a little thrill of triumph, she had angered Mrs. Frostick, and as they neared the street where the old charwoman lived, she alighted, with a "good day, m'am!" in a demure voice.

Mrs. Frostick vouchsafed no answer, and in no amiable mood reached her own door.

Betty rushed out to greet her, and then began to narrate the wonderful news.

"Just hold your tongue! Do you suppose folks coming such a journey as mine, wants to be fashed with doings like theirs?" So old Betty hobbled off, considerably snubbed, and brought in some tea and some ham.

After this refreshment was over, old Mrs. Frostick was a little mollified.

"Now Betty, you may tell me what I don't know, but I heard the minute I got in the town; folks always are so full of other people's doings."

"My lady and Mrs. Luttrell were there, and Mr. Johnson's sister and Master Adolphus."

"What was he doing there?"

"I don't know exactly, missus! I thought it was him as was going to be married; he seemed talking and doing about, and laughing with everyone, and Miss Harriet had on a real grand white silk dress with a train, and Miss Tilly's gown was pale green."

"And a pretty object she must have looked in it, with her face like a bit of whitey-brown paper!"

"The colonel's lady," continued Betty, "had a brown silk dress, and my lady a dark grey, and as for old Mister, he was as

fine as fine could be. A great posy as big as a saucer stuck in his coat, a white westkit, a——"

"There, that will do, I am getting nigh sick of them Browns--it's nothing but Browns wherever you turn."

"There's a young lord as have been stopping at the Red House, and now he's gone on to the Towers."

"What's his name?"

"I can't think, mum!"

"Then you may go."

"So you've got home, neighbour Frostick!" cried Brown's hearty old voice at the open door. "How do you find y'rself after yer stay in London city, m'am?"

"Quite well, Brown! Why shouldn't I?"

"Why not? Only you're not so young as you were, and journeys to old folks is wearisome-like."

Mrs. Frostick drew herself up, highly offended. "Old, indeed!"

"I suppose, neighbour, now you've come into a fortune, you'll be too grand for us poor folks."

"Oh, dear no! Not now you've got a 'parson' in the family," she answered sarcastically.

"Well, I was just a coming to that. Here's a bit of cake wrapped up in satin ribbon. Tilly put it up for you. You can put it under your pillow. It was a pity you was away, neighbour, while all our grand doings was on," said the old man with sly unction in his voice.

"Ah! David Brown. I ain't quite so soft as I look!"

David Brown was half a mind to tell her she was the hardest-looking old female he had ever set eyes on, but he refrained. Had they not got the best of her?

"We have got a tea coming off to-morrow evening. Will yer come, and meet my son and his wife?"

"My son? We're getting on, David Brown."

"We are," answered the old man succinctly.

"And when does Tilly intend to be married?"

"Oh! we don't quite know yet. But now, neighbour, I must be going. There's all Langton, nearly, calling on Mr. and Mrs. Johnson."

"Lawk-a-day!" said she as he passed down the street. Nevertheless she felt she had been worsted.

That it should all have been going on under her very nose, and she not to know anything about it!

But she would be even with them, sooner or later.

CHAPTER XVII.

ADOLPHUS was a constant visitor at the Towers. He was wildly in love with Sabina, but she, knowing what it all led to before, was careful to give him no encouragement; on the contrary, she avoided him as delicately as she could, and yet she felt sorry for him. To Percy Blythe—once the object of her own love and scorn, she confided her present trouble. "Oh, Mr. Blythe! can't you tell him not to come so much? You know how it caused the quarrel two years ago with Lord Frampton and myself. Arthur trusts me so now, I would avoid every appearance of flirting."

"Dear Miss Maitland, I think you are perfectly wise," said Mr. Blythe in kind tones. Rest assured I will do everything

to get him to return to his studies. The drawback is his mother's fondness for his presence! Nothing gives her so much happiness as to have him to look at!"

"Dear Lady Louisa! She is so good to others, it seems a shame to take *her* pleasure away! Work is good for him all the same. Are there no nice girls about here now?"

He shook his head.

"Stay! Used he not to like Adelaide Craster?"

"He had a fancy that way," said Percy with a smile, "but Miss Craster is too old for him."

And he might have said he had just the slightest weakness for her himself.

"I will take master Adolphus in hand. Make your mind easy."

Percy had resumed his old friendship at the Red House. Nothing in life gave him so much pleasure as to spend a stray half

hour in Mrs. Luttrell's company. His old love was not dead, only altered—idealised as it were. She would always be the most charming woman he would ever know, but he could honestly look his host in the face. The pleasant hours in the evening would glide away in their company, and it refreshed him exceedingly; and he valued the friendship of Colonel Luttrell almost as much as his wife's. It no longer grieved him to see the love between the two.

Percy told Mrs. Luttrell of Sabina's embarrassment about Adolphus.

"Poor child! She had many a *mauvais quart d'heure*. *Apropos* of that young man. What a pity a nice girl can't be found for him."

"That is exactly what Miss Maitland said. But nice girls can't be made 'to order.' And even if we found one, there is

quite the possibility that Adolphus would not like her."

A way was found out of the difficulty, for unexpectedly Mr. and Mrs. Vere were giving a dance, and Adolphus was urgently required. And as he was exceedingly fond of his cousins Pauline and Charlie Vere, it pleased him to go.

"I wish you were going, Sabina," said he dolefully.

"No, Adolphus! I can't leave for one thing, and I don't care to go without Arthur."

"Why without Arthur more than me?"

"Because, Adolphus, I am going to *marry* Arthur, and *not* you!" She said it so kindly he could not take offence, but his boyish face was eloquent with wounded love.

"I thought it was all over between you?" he said resentfully.

"Yes," she answered, with a warm blush, "but we have 'made it up,' as the children say."

"You were not so unkind in the old days."

"No; I was wicked and foolish. And now, dear Adolphus, I do love Arthur very, very much; so you must not expect too much of me. Adolphus!"

"Well?"

"Don't you think Eva Mountchesney is a very nice girl?"

"I don't know; I do not think any girls are nice," said the young man, with a lamentable lack of politeness. "You used to be. I can't see why I'm not as good as Frampton, except he's a Viscount, which I am not."

"Ah, but I *loved* him first! I have always liked you, Adolphus; you know that. Believe me, there are nice girls,

and pretty ones, if you would only look about."

"I don't want to look about, and I tell you I don't care for them; and as you will have nothing to say to me, I shall go. Good-bye, Sabina!"

"Good-bye, Adolphus! Don't be cross with me."

He was too angry for any blandishments, so that when he arrived at the Rectory, Percy had no difficulty in discovering that Sabina had given "a quietus," however gentle, to the unfortunate Adolphus.

"Mother," announced that gentleman, "I am going up to Pauline's to-morrow, and afterwards back to work. A fellow gets sick of doing nothing. It's beastly down here."

"Why, Adolphus, I thought you told me you enjoyed it?" said his mother, much hurt.

"Oh, well, I have changed my opinion. A fellow can change his opinion, I suppose, if he chooses?"

"I think he will be all the better for some work, Lady Louisa," said Percy Blythe. "Even the best of us get tired of doing nothing."

"Now, mother, I shall run down again soon, you *know* I shall," for his mother looked aggrieved.

"Well, dear, I suppose all mothers have to part from their sons," said Lady Louisa, reluctantly. "Don't work *too* hard, and knock yourself up. So many young men do that now-a-days."

"I am sure Adolphus will take care of himself," said Mr. Blythe, with a twinkle in his eye.

Adolphus saw it, and, cross as he was, he felt he could not help smiling too. No one believed in his hard work but his mother.

"Never you fear, mother; I will take care of myself."

She left the room for a few moments, and presently returned with a crisp note for ten pounds.

"There, dear; I always save all my petty cash for you. It is sure to be useful."

"What an old brick you are, mater! There isn't a mother to beat you in all the county!"

Lady Louisa was amply repaid.

"You are very welcome, dear, to it."

And Adolphus really kissed her with affection, for his errors were those of head, not heart.

When the Rector heard of his son's intention to resume work, he was also pleased.

"When do you go, Adolphus?"

"To-morrow."

"Are you going to accept Pauline's invite?"

"Rather, sir."

"Before you go to-morrow, come into my study."

And when Adolphus presented himself, his father handed him a cheque for ten pounds! With a good deal of pleasure Adolphus pocketed it (he discreetly said nothing about his mother's present), so that if he was unlucky in his love affairs, his financial ones were in a most satisfactory condition.

"Well, young man, I don't think you have done badly," said Mr. Blythe, with a laugh.

"No, I have not," answered Mr. Adolphus, decidedly consoled.

"Now, Adolphus, do buckle to, and work."

"I will, Blythe, upon my word!"

"All right, old fellow; I shall trust to your honour."

And so Adolphus departed, and when he reached his cousins' house, he really felt cheered. After all, it was no use making himself miserable, he could not make Sabina love him. And Eva Mountchesney was really very nice. Of course, she could not be compared to Sabina. But if Sabina was engaged to that tall, lanky Frampton, there was nothing more to be done. He would make a name — do something wonderful!— and then Miss Sabina might regret she had not taken the short Frampton instead of the tall one.

"Pauline, did you know Frampton and Sabina were engaged again?"

"No, Adolphus, but I am very glad, and not in the least surprised; though I think Sabina behaved very badly to him."

"Badly to him! In what way?"

"Why, was she not always flirting with you and Jack Chetwynd?"

"And is that why they quarrelled?"

"Yes."

Mr. Adolphus saw things much more clearly now.

"Then I put my foot in it?"

"Most decidedly."

"Well, I will take good care I don't do it again."

"'O, wise young judge, O, learned Jew,' etc," quoted Pauline.

"Now look here, Adolphus, there is plenty of time for you; you are not even of age yet."

"No; but I shall be, in a few months time."

"Very well; take my advice, and don't rush into matrimony or even in love. Girls think so much more of a man if he is a few years over twenty, instead of one year under."

"How old is Frampton, then?"

"About seven-and-twenty."

"It wasn't 'even' running, then?"

"No, not as regards age," said Pauline, with a laugh.

So, carefully turning the matter over in his own mind, Adolphus submitted to circumstances, and resigned himself — as his father had done before him — to what he could not possibly alter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Winter reigned supreme at Langton. Snow covered the ground. Every tree and shrub glittered with frost, and the youthful world skated at its pleasure. Rosy faces, that the snow threw up with bright clear light, looked charming, while the elders looked out of their windows, and shivered. Christmas was just over, and on New Year's day, Adolphus Frampton came of age.

There were to be grand doings—a ball at the Town Hall—while all Lady Louisa's friends were to be with her on this auspicious occasion.

Dr. and Mrs. Lewis had returned from their long trip, with results that delighted the Doctor; Colonel and Mrs. Luttrell

were to come down from London; Sir Gerald and Lady Lanyon would arrive from Devonshire; Mr. and Mrs. Cyril Dashwood would put up somewhere in the town, and Sir Ernest and Lady Beldon, who had only landed about a fortnight, had promised to come likewise.

These last two friends had not accomplished the desire that had so eagerly possessed them of finding the unfortunate woman; but they had heard that the renowned Tom Heenan had been sentenced to penal servitude for life, so that he was not likely to trouble his fellow creatures for the future. They left instructions with their Sydney lawyers, that if any information should come to them, they were to follow it up with every possible pecuniary assistance to his wife. Sir Ernest had done everything that could be done. The long cruise had been invalu-

able to them. Both the young Baronet and his wife had quite recovered their former health, and the little Lanyon and his sister had proved themselves admirable sailors. But still, these were glad to be once more in their own home, and much happiness came from the fact that Sir Percy and Lady Willis were in a much better financial condition than they had ever been before, for Sir Ernest had generously divided the large fortune between the two houses. So the New Year promised to open with much satisfaction to many of them.

Adolphus began to feel a person of great importance, for he was the hero of the day, and his presents were in every way satisfactory to himself.

The day of the ball arrived, and those people who could not go to the ball were to be admitted by tickets to the galleries,

so that they could see the grand doings below of their more fortunate friends. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson had received invitations, likewise Tilly. Many of the old county families would be present to do honour to the coming of age of the grandson of the late Earl Vanseur.

No woman could feel more proud than did Lady Louisa. And it was with deep pleasure her dear friends Hester and Esmé were there, with their respective husbands, while the Rector was greatly gratified to have his *ci-devant* curates with him again. Gerald so cheery, so genial, Cyril so handsome, so pleasant, and Percy, whom he loved like a son, a little older, a little graver, but always the same sweet, unselfish temper. Yes! These three men, all in their several ways, were attached to each other and their old Rector. There was a strong link of friendship between

them all. And they were rejoiced at the meeting, and the occasion that had brought them together. And their wives! Where would you find a sweeter mother than Lady Louisa, or anything more gracious than Hester? while Esmé was the picture of beautiful happiness, and the Veres and the Luttrells, to say nothing of charming Sabina and her lord, of Lady Laura, of sweet Peggy Dashwood!

Mrs. Frostick was even satisfied at the *mise-en-scène*, as she looked down on the brilliant throng, with old David beside her, for they had buried the hatchet for the nonce, and both were genuinely gratified. *He* felt proud to see his daughters and son-in-law among "the quality." And, knowing nearly everybody, as they did, both Mrs. Frostick and her neighbour were deeply interested, so can we do better than leave them all on the threshold of

a new year, with the fortunes of our friends "The Three Curates" safely and happily assured?

"All nature is but art, unknown to thee;
All chance, directions which thou can'st not see;
All discord, harmony not understood;
All partial evil, universal good;
And spite of pride, in erring reason's spite,
One thing is clear, whatever is, is right."

THE END.